

CONSTABLE



M. STURGE HENDERSON

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# CONSTABLE

BY

M. STURGE HENDERSON



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## PREFACE

IN the chapters recording the life of Constable, I have aimed at presenting the actions and interests of the artist as vividly as is compatible with a strictly chronological arrangement. The method chosen has the obvious drawback of disallowing continuous treatment according to subject, but it probably possesses a more than compensating advantage, the avowed object of the series to which this volume is contributed being the provision of "a convenient storehouse of that positive knowledge which must form the constant basis of all opinion." Except where the contrary is stated, all letters and extracts are taken from the *Life* of the artist written by his friend C. R. Leslie; Leslie's chronicle was complete in essentials, and during the last sixty years no incident of importance has been added to it.

For thoughtful courtesy in arrangements enabling me to examine paintings in their private collections, my thanks are due to Mrs. Ashton, Mr. Thomas Girtin,

Sir Charles Tennant, and Mr. Vernon Watney. I am indebted to Mrs. Charles Hobbs, Mrs. George Unwin, Mr. C. J. Holmes, and Mr. Whitworth Wallis for numerous suggestions; to the Fine Art Department of the Board of Education for generous and ungrudging aid in compiling a catalogue of the drawings and sketches at South Kensington; and to Mr. J. Bain and Messrs. Colnaghi for the loan of books. I have also to thank Mr. Basil de Sélincourt for reading the work in manuscript and revising the sheets for the press.

# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTORY . . . . .	I
II. CONSTABLE'S LIFE, 1776-1811 . . . . .	10
III. CONSTABLE'S LIFE, 1811-1817 . . . . .	26
IV. CONSTABLE'S LIFE, 1817-1826 . . . . .	49
V. CONSTABLE'S LIFE, 1826-1837 . . . . .	79
VI. THE LUCAS MEZZOTINTS . . . . .	114
VII. CONSTABLE'S LECTURES . . . . .	147
VIII. CHARACTERISTICS . . . . .	167
IX. GENERAL ESTIMATE. . . . .	184
X. CONSTABLE'S INFLUENCE ON LANDSCAPE PAINTING	195
APPENDIX . . . . .	209
INDEX . . . . .	221





## ILLUSTRATIONS

I. John Constable at the Age of Twenty (painted by David Gardner in 1796). <i>South Kensington</i> . . . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
II. Dedham Vale (Oil Painting). <i>South Kensington</i> . . . . .	<i>To face page 18</i>
III. A Windmill (Black Chalk). <i>South Kensington</i> . . . . .	,, 19
IV. Dedham Vale (Oil Painting). <i>National Gallery</i> . . . . .	,, 20
V. Golding Constable's House. East Bergholt (Oil Painting). <i>In possession of James Orrock, Esq.</i> . . . .	,, 22
VI. On the Stour near Dedham (Oil Painting). <i>South Kensington</i> . . . . .	,, 24
VII. A Village Fair (Oil Painting). <i>South Kensington</i> . . . . .	,, 32
VIII. Dedham Vale (Oil Painting). <i>South Kensington</i> . . . . .	,, 40

- |   |                 |
|---|-----------------|
| IX. A Cottage in a Cornfield (Oil Painting). <i>South Kensington</i> . . . . .                            | To face page 50 |
| X. Harwich. Sea and Lighthouse (Oil Painting). <i>Tate Gallery, Millbank</i> . . . . .                    | „ 52            |
| XI. Water Meadows near Salisbury (Oil Painting). <i>South Kensington</i> . . . . .                        | „ 53            |
| XII. View at Hampstead Heath (Oil Painting). <i>South Kensington</i> . . . . .                            | „ 55            |
| XIII. The Haywain (Oil Sketch). <i>South Kensington</i> . . . . .   | „ 57            |
| XIV. The Old Bridge, Abingdon (Pencil). <i>South Kensington</i> . . . . .                                 | „ 58            |
| XV. Canal Banks, Newbury (Pencil and Wash). <i>South Kensington</i> . . . . .                             | „ 60            |
| XVI. Old Houses at Harnham Bridge, Salisbury (Water-colour). <i>South Kensington</i> . . . . .            | „ 61            |
| XVII. Salisbury Cathedral from the Bishop's Garden (Oil Painting). <i>South Kensington</i> . . . . .      | „ 65            |
| XVIII. Bentley, Suffolk (Pencil). <i>British Museum</i> . . . . .   | „ 67            |
| XIX. Dedham Lock, or the Leaping Horse (Oil Painting). <i>Diploma Gallery, Burlington House</i> . . . . . | „ 75            |

XX. The Cornfield (Oil Painting). <i>National Gallery</i> . . . . .	To face page 80
XXI. Gillingham Mill, Dorsetshire (Oil Painting). <i>South Kensington</i> . . . . .	„ 82
XXII. A Summer Afternoon after a Shower (Oil Painting). <i>National Gallery</i> . . . . .	„ 86
XXIII. The Gleaners (Oil Painting). <i>National Gallery</i> . . . . .	„ 88
XXIV. Hampstead Heath (Oil Painting). <i>South Kensington</i> . . . . .	„ 90
XXV. Salisbury (Oil, Study for the large Picture). <i>National Gallery</i> . . . . .	„ 91
XXVI. Salisbury Cathedral, from the Meadows. ( <i>From the Mezzotint by David Lucas</i> ) . . . . .	„ 92
XXVII. A View at Hampstead (Oil Painting). <i>National Gallery</i> . . . . .	„ 98
XXVIII. Stoke Pogis Church (Water-colour). <i>South Kensington</i> . . . . .	„ 102
XXIX. The Valley Farm (Oil Painting). <i>National Gallery</i> . . . . .	„ 104
XXX. Dedham Vale. ( <i>From the Mezzotint by David Lucas</i> ) . . . . .	„ 139

- XXXI. A Boat Passing a Lock. (*From the Mezzotint by S. W. Reynolds*) . To face page 145
- XXXII. Study of Ash Trees (Pencil).  
*South Kensington* . . . . . „ 164
- XXXIII. Study of Trees at Hampstead  
(Pencil). *South Kensington* . . . . . „ 165
- XXXIV. Reading, from the River (Pencil).  
*South Kensington* . . . . . „ 177
- XXXV. Cart and Horses (Sketch in Oils).  
*South Kensington* . . . . . „ 178
- XXXVI. Stem of an Elm Tree (Oil). *South Kensington* . . . . . „ 179
- XXXVII. Stonehenge (Water - colour).  
*South Kensington* . . . . . „ 180
- XXXVIII. Windmill on Downs near Brighton (Wash). *South Kensington* . . . . . „ 192
- XXXIX. A Mill near Brighton (Oil Painting). *South Kensington* . . . . . „ 193

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTORY

THE years between 1800 and 1900 have moved us far in temper and understanding from most of the critics and artists by whom John Constable was surrounded. The tradition of landscape-painting in England, into which Wilson and Gainsborough had infused reality, had degenerated at the beginning of the nineteenth century into the mechanical application of technical formulæ. Sir George Beaumont, Constable's friend and patron, and a leading connoisseur of the day, was indeed the proud possessor and ardent admirer of a collection of paintings by Claude; but from the evidence of his own works and his recorded criticisms of the younger artist, it may be surmised that Sir George—in common with many of Claude's disciples—valued and imitated chiefly the mannerisms and devices which encumbered the genius of their master.

Nearly a century after the death of Claude, a worthy

successor and disciple of his tradition had arisen among English artists in the person of Richard Wilson. The defects of Wilson's work are obvious; to satisfy a public inured to "classical" landscape he frequently introduced mythical figures in incongruous rural surroundings. Yet the fact that the absurdity of their introduction is obvious is, in a sense, a tribute to his work. In proof of this, it is only necessary to question whether we should in the same degree resent the presence of the same figures in the paintings of De Loutherbourg or Sir George Beaumont? Ruskin has dismissed Wilson's work as being devoid of originality and merely forming the historic link between the Italian and English schools of landscape-painting; but this estimate is inadequate; for his rendering of colour and atmosphere excited the admiration of Turner, and is, indeed, comparable to Turner's. Associated with Wilson's in the revival of English painting is the greater name of one who turned for inspiration to Rubens and the tradition of Flanders. In his mastery of colour, Gainsborough has been without a successor, and, to this technical gift, inherited from the painters of an older time, he added a love and reverence for English scenery that was new. But the Flemish tradition which he accepted tended to render landscape in masses and by abstract indications of form and outline, rather than in careful representa-

tions of particular objects or effects, and to modern eyes his pictures, graceful and enchanting as they are, appear to be "studies in colour and feeling" rather than representations of actuality. At first sight, indeed, we incline, while placing Gainsborough in the front rank of artists as a draughtsman and colourist, to connect his work with the pastoral lyrics of the century to which he belonged: those elms, that arch so lovingly above the idealised cottages of picturesque peasants, have no counterpart in rural England. But as we are about to resign ourselves to enjoyment, with the comfortable sense of having established a parallel between literary and pictorial art, we are arrested by certain statements of Gainsborough's contemporaries, which disclose to us the inadequacy of our classification. Reynolds saw in the works of Gainsborough "a portrait-like representation of nature," and Constable, whose naturalism in painting was as conscious and pre-determined as Wordsworth's in literature, said: "The lonely haunts of the solitary shepherd—the return of the rustic with his bill and bundle of wood—the darksome dale or dell—the sweet little cottage girl at the spring with her pitcher—were the things he delighted to paint, and which he painted with an exquisite refinement, yet not a refinement beyond nature;" and earlier, writing from Ipswich in August 1799, "I fancy I see



Gainsborough in every hedge and hollow tree." The explanation of this wide divergence between Constable's estimate of Gainsborough's achievement, and our own, lies in the completeness of the revolution that Constable himself effected. He founded a school that endures; and, in essentials, regarded his art as it is regarded by landscapists to-day. For a century, artists great and small have in some degree begun where he ended, and built upon his foundation. Much for which he fought and laboured has now come to be taken for granted, and we are unable to conceive of landscape art in England as having existed in its absence. As a historical introduction to Constable, his own estimate of Gainsborough is the best that can be devised. For we shall have small difficulty in recognising his achievement, if we realise that in his day Gainsborough was the chief exponent of naturalism, and that, moreover, Reynolds and Constable were correct, viewing Gainsborough in relation to his contemporaries, in calling him a realist.

Early in the eighteenth century the traditions of the great masters of the Dutch and Italian schools of painting had become obscured by the nerveless imitations of the copyists who succeeded them. Art on the Continent of Europe was without life. England, until that time, had produced no notable painters; all previously



working within her borders had been, by birth, aliens. Then Hogarth, Romney, and Reynolds arose ; and meanwhile, in landscape alone, English artists vitalised two European traditions, and, in some respects at least, created a third. Wilson, outwardly retaining obvious features common to the stereotyped paintings of the followers of Claude, by virtue of greater truth and delicacy of feeling, wrought a change in spirit and produced original and poetic works. Gainsborough, working in the Flemish method, turned altogether from the historical tradition, left ruined castles, and the whole realm of the pseudo-pastoral, to find his themes in the contemporary life of his own countryside. He treated his subjects in a manner that to us appears fanciful, but to have decided that they were capable of treatment indicates a change in mental outlook from the standpoint of Wilson, that is, in itself, immense. Cozens produced sketches in water-colour, which, spite of their limitations in composition and material, are noble and original in feeling, and free from the pomposity of Wilson and the glamour of Gainsborough.

This the eighteenth century had accomplished, but the landscape-painters who effected the revolution found a scanty sale for their works, no general national taste having, as yet, been awakened. Consequently, at the end of the century, and about the time of Constable's

birth, painting in England had relapsed again to the level from which it had been partially redeemed by direct and national feeling, the level of the foreign mannerist and copyist by whom it had been debased before the advent of Wilson and Gainsborough. But Constable's talents were by no means of the precocious order—until he was thirty years of age he produced little that is noteworthy—and before he reached maturity many changes had taken place. Crome, Girtin, and Cotman, James Ward, Morland, and Barker had been at work, while Turner had produced *The Garden of the Hesperides*, and, in 1803, his *Calais Pier* had been exhibited.

Constable's ideal was essentially different from that of earlier landscapists. The difference is easy to feel but difficult to formulate because it is fundamental, and, when we dig too curiously and determinedly in search of its roots, we are landed in quicksands of unprofitable discussion as to the scope and purpose of art. The story of the manner in which Constable met Sir George Beaumont's assertion that the colour of a good picture should match that of an old violin, by placing a Cremona on the lawn at Cole Orton, is sometimes recounted in a way that unnecessarily belittles the arguments and intelligence of the controversialists. We are not to suppose that Sir George mistook, or was

incapable of discerning, the hue of the grass, or that Constable imagined a picture could be produced by the matched patterns of a draper's assistant, but that the older man pointed, as it were, to the traditions of the Fathers, while the younger asserted that alien authority was being pressed too far and the creed needed modification under differing geographical conditions. Obviously, all art is, to a certain extent, conventional. In painting, both form and colour must be brought to some predetermined scale and harmony which aims at presentation of their relative, and not their actual, values. The whole question is one of degree. The early landscapists showed little intimate knowledge of natural things; the world of nature they treated as a storehouse of raw material, and held themselves fancy-free in selecting and combining forms and colours, provided only that their elaborations were inwardly consistent and harmonious in effect. Constable—on the other hand—knew his Suffolk lanes closely and intimately before he had examined paintings, and was sketching localities, while as yet he did not dream of laws underlying the construction of pictures. Finding, after a time, that there was no royal road to the mastery of technique, he gave himself whole-heartedly to study of the old Masters, and his lectures on painting insist on the necessity for long apprenticeship and

laborious enterprise in his craft. But this only implies a fuller recognition of the subtlety and complexity of the means, his view of the end remained unchanged. When, in 1802, he wrote to Dunthorne that he was returning to Bergholt—for he was weary of copying and attempting second-hand compositions—and breaks out, *There is room for a natural painter*, he intellectualises and adopts a point of view which in his earliest days had been instinctive and fortuitous. Late in life he stood, with Northcote, before a painting hung in the Exhibition, which, professing to represent a real scene, was treated in a “poetic” manner, and this note on the incident remains among his papers—“What is painting but an imitative art? an art that is to *realise*, not to *feign*. I constantly observe that every man who will not submit to a long toil in the imitation of nature flies off, becomes a phantom, and produces dreams of nonsense and abortions. He thinks to screen himself under ‘a fine imagination,’ which is generally, and almost always in young men, the scape-goat of folly and idleness.”

This is no place for a dissertation on the distinction between fancy and imagination. It was inevitable that, in his reaction from falsehood, Constable should fail to realise fully the existence of a truth transcending facts, and should lay a certain negative emphasis on actuality.

This is sometimes apparent in his dislike of any kind of mysticism or elaboration of expression. There is a story that Blake, while looking through one of Constable's sketch-books, came on a beautiful drawing of fir-trees on Hampstead Heath, and exclaimed: "Why, this is not drawing, but inspiration." "I meant it for drawing," Constable quietly replied. The tale might almost be taken as an epitome of the opposing ideals of the two artists. Constable, in temperament and outlook, has much in common with a poet whose work he admired, and whose practice of reading little poetry, for fear of contracting the habit of imitation, he commended. He complained, with Cowper—

" Digression is so much in modern use,  
Thought is so rare, and fancy so profuse,  
Some never seem so wide of their intent,  
As when returning to the theme they meant;  
As mendicants, whose business is to roam,  
Make every parish, but their own, their home."

In avoidance of this error both painter and poet became, in certain respects, parochial. Yet, of Constable's parish, it may be said that, before him, no attempt had been made to set its kind upon canvas; and since his day his method of presenting it has probably remained unequalled, and certainly has never been surpassed.

## CHAPTER II

### CONSTABLE'S LIFE, 1776-1811

JOHN CONSTABLE was born at East Bergholt, in Suffolk, on June 11, 1776. He was the second son of Golding Constable, who was owner of the water mills at Flatford and Dedham, and of two windmills in the neighbourhood of East Bergholt. Though very delicate as an infant, he grew into a healthy boy, and at the age of seven was sufficiently robust to be sent to a boarding-school about fifteen miles from his home. From this he passed to one at Lavenham, and thence to the Grammar School at Dedham, where he remained till he was seventeen. He was a favourite with the headmaster, Dr. Grimwood, though he does not, as a scholar, appear to have excelled in anything but penmanship. Before he was sixteen years old his fondness for painting had become noticeable, and was commented on by his teachers, who appear to have been lenient to the lack of interest in other studies which resulted from it.



At East Bergholt all his spare time was spent in the company of John Dunthorne, a plumber and glazier, who lived close to Golding Constable's home. Dunthorne devoted his leisure to landscape-painting, and in this pursuit John Constable was his constant companion.

The bent of the boy's mind was already quite clear, but his father objected to his adopting art as a profession, and wished him to prepare for the Church. The thought of taking Orders, however, was so distasteful to him that it was agreed he should enter the milling business. For about a year he was at work in his father's mills, and the good use to which in after life he turned the intimate knowledge thus gained of the construction of wind and water mills, has frequently been remarked upon. He worked conscientiously at the business, but his desires were unchanged, and during this period his mother's insight and sympathy led her to procure for him an introduction to Sir George Beaumont, who was in the habit of coming to Dedham to visit his mother, the Dowager Countess of Beaumont. At her house Constable first saw a painting by Claude, that which Sir George always carried with him on his journeys, the *Hagar* now in the National Gallery. Sir George also drew the young painter's attention to some thirty water-colour drawings by Girtin, also in his

possession. The influence of the first pictures to which he was introduced, on a youth of Constable's temperament and ambition, must, in any case, have been great, but the paintings being what they were, the result was, in all probability, inestimable. Girtin died at the age of twenty-seven, and suffered in his lifetime from ill-health, but his achievement nevertheless is so great that Turner's saying "Had Girtin lived, I should have starved" is no hyperbole. His nobility of conception and design, his intensity of feeling and directness of expression, have, as yet, only been surpassed by the painter whose work, in the days of their comradeship, he outrivalled. Ruskin himself has said: "There were two men associated with Turner in early study, who showed high promise in the same field, Cozens and Girtin, and there is no saying what those men might have done had they lived; there might, perhaps, have been a struggle between one or other of them and Turner, as between Giorgione and Titian." And again: "Girtin is often as impressive to me as Nature herself; nor do I doubt that Turner owed more to his teaching and companionship than to his own genius in the first years of his life."

By the year 1795, Golding Constable had become sufficiently convinced of the stability of his son's desires, to consent to his making a tentative visit to London to



ascertain the value of his talents and performance. He was given a letter of introduction to Farrington, a pupil of Wilson's, and became acquainted with John Thomas Smith, well known at the time as an engraver and antiquary. One piece of advice given to John Constable by Smith, and recorded by Leslie, is of interest, not only for its soundness, but also as a comment upon the artificiality of the period. "Do not," he says, "set about inventing figures for a landscape taken from nature; for you cannot remain an hour in any spot, however solitary, without the appearance of some living thing that will, in all probability, accord better with the scene and time of day than will any invention of your own." From Smith Constable learned the rudiments of etching, and for the next two years the friends corresponded constantly on subjects relating to art. During those years Constable's time appears to have been divided between London and Suffolk. At Bergholt, he was making sketches, reading lives of artists, studying anatomy and practising etching. Pen-and-ink drawings belonging to the year 1796 are to be seen at South Kensington, and in 1797 he reported to Smith that he had completed two paintings in oil, *A Chymist* and *An Alchymist*. The sketches are weak and uninteresting, and show little or no promise of power; and in the oil-paintings even the

eyes of affection could discern no merit. Leslie reports them to have been worthless and comments only on the fact that "the chymist is neat and comfortable, the alchymist ragged and poverty struck." Psychologically the conception is of interest as affording a proof of Constable's distrust of the supernatural and metaphysical to which allusion already has been made.

At this point in John Constable's career all the facts seemed to confirm Golding Constable's criticism of his son's professional choice, and it is not surprising to learn, from a letter written to Smith, on March 2, 1797, that the young man's friends had felt they were not justified in longer encouraging his ambition. He says: "I must now take your advice and attend to my father's business, as we are likely soon to lose an old servant (our clerk), who has been with us for eighteen years; and now I see plainly it will be my lot to walk through life in a path contrary to that in which my inclination would lead me." In October of the same year Mrs. Constable writes to Smith thanking him for his kindness, and anticipating with satisfaction her son's immediate return to take up his permanent residence and business at Bergholt, "by which," she says, "he will please his father and ensure his own respectability and comfort."

To the next, and most important change in the routine of Constable's life, his biographer is unable to provide us with the key. He simply states that in the year 1799 John Constable resumed his pencil, never again to lay it aside, and quotes a letter to Dunthorne, written from London on February 4th of that year, which begins thus: "I am this morning admitted a student at the Royal Academy; the figure which I drew for admittance was the Torso. I am now comfortably settled in Cecil Street, Strand, No. 23, and shall begin painting as soon as I have the loan of a sweet little picture by Jacob Ruysdael to copy." In another letter to Dunthorne, probably written in the winter of the same year, Constable says that his evenings are occupied in making drawings and reading, that Smith has agreed to take his pictures into his shop for sale, and that he hopes, by means of them, to clear his rent. He reports that he has copied two Wilsons, a small landscape of Agostino Caracci, a Ruysdael, Claude's *Hagar*—and continues, later: "I shall remain in town the chief of this summer. Indeed I find it necessary to fag at copying some time yet to acquire execution. The more facility of practice I get, the more pleasure I shall find in my art; without the power of execution I should be continually embarrassed, and it would be a burden to me. This fine weather almost makes me melancholy; it recalls so

forcibly every scene we have visited and drawn together. I love every stile and stump and every lane in the village." In the summer of 1800 he writes, again to Dunthorne: "I am alone among the oaks and solitudes of Helmingham Park. I have taken quiet possession of the parsonage, finding it empty. A woman comes from the farmhouse where I eat, and makes my bed, and I am left at liberty to wander where I please during the day. There are abundance of fine trees of all sorts, and the park on the whole affords good subjects rather than fine scenery. But I can hardly judge yet what I may have to show you. I have made one or two drawings that may be useful." In the following year, 1801, Constable made a tour in Derbyshire and produced a number of sketches, most of them washed in one tint only, but displaying a power of drawing and composition lacking in his earlier work. Twelve of these studies are to be found in the collection at South Kensington.

In this alternation of laborious copying "to acquire execution" with his earlier practice of making realistic sketches from nature, Constable seems to have discovered the true method of enlarging his possibilities, and from this time onward a sufficient measure of power was apparent in his work, to warrant its continuance, in the eyes of competent critics. But meanwhile the strenuous

sincerity of his labours augmented the estrangement he had felt already to exist between him and the majority of his contemporaries. In the year of his visit to Derbyshire, 1801, he tells Dunthorne that he has moved to 50 Rathbone Place, and says, of his new quarters : " I hope to be able to keep more to myself than I did in former times, in London. I have been among my old acquaintances in the art, and am enough disgusted (between ourselves) with their cold trumpery stuff. The more canvas they cover the more they discover their own ignorance and total want of feeling. I have seen —— twice. He has painted a landscape, Dedham, from the sketch he took from Mrs. Roberts's. It is very well pencilled, and there is plenty of light *without any light at all.*"

In January 1802 he writes with enthusiasm of a course of lectures on anatomy, by Mr. Brookes, which he is attending. In this year his name first appears in the list of exhibitors at the Royal Academy as the contributor of a small *Landscape*. He owed much to the encouragement of Benjamin West, the President of the Academy, who persuaded him to refuse a post as drawing-master which was offered to him about this time. When earlier, probably in 1800 or 1801, he had been suffering under the rejection by the Academy Committee of a painting of Flatford Mill,



he had carried a picture to West for his opinion, which was given in these words: "Don't be disheartened, young man, we shall hear of you again; you must have loved nature very much before you could have painted this." The President then took a piece of chalk and showed how the chiaroscuro might be improved by touches of light between the stems and branches of the trees, remarking meanwhile, "Always remember, sir, that light and shadow *never stand still*." This year, 1802, Constable wrote to Dunthorne: "I am just returned from a visit to Sir George Beaumont's pictures, with a deep conviction of the truth of Sir Joshua Reynolds' observation, that 'there is no easy way of becoming a good painter.' For the last two years I have been running after pictures, and seeking the truth at second hand. I have not endeavoured to represent nature with the same elevation of mind with which I set out, but have rather tried to make my performance look like the work of other men. I am come to a determination to make no idle visits this summer, nor to give up my time to commonplace people. I shall return to Bergholt, where I shall endeavour to get a pure and unaffected manner of representing the scenes that may employ me. There is little or nothing in the Exhibition worth looking up to. *There is room enough for a natural painter*. The great vice of the present day is *bravura*, an attempt



*Oil Painting*

DEDHAM VALE

*South Kensington*

To face page 18









*Black Chalk*

A WINDMILL

*South Kensington*

To face page 19

to do something beyond the truth." A notable first-fruit of this resolution is the small upright *Dedham Vale*, painted in the September of that year. This sketch, forming the first of our illustrations, was a genuinely realistic attempt, and proved sufficiently true and direct to be developed, twenty-six years later, into a large Academy picture. Its distance has a remote reposeful quality reminiscent of an early Italian landscape; but, in comparison with Constable's later work, it appears rather dull and conventional in colouring. The *Windmill*, in black chalk and wash, dated October 3rd of the same year, is noteworthy, being vigorous and forcible without restlessness. A balance in feeling is maintained between the movement of the mill and sky and the tranquil, almost sleepy, nature of the landscape. The sketch is evidence of the fact, confirmed by the Lucas engravings, that Constable's work is not dependent on colour to the degree that has sometimes been supposed.

In 1803 he exhibited four works at the Academy, two *Landscapes* and two *Studies from Nature*, and in April of that year made many sketches of shipping. He tells Dunthorne that he has been nearly a month on board an East Indiaman, going from London to Deal, and has made drawings of "ships in all situations." In 1804 he did not exhibit, but painted an altar-piece for

Brantham Church, near Bergholt, *Christ Blessing Little Children*. The figures are life-size, but the work is without merit; it has been removed from its original conspicuous position, but it may still be seen hung upon the south wall of the church. In the following year, 1805, he exhibited *A Landscape, Moonlight*.

In 1806, through the generosity of his uncle, David Pike Watts, he was enabled to visit the Lake district, where he spent two months and made a large number of sketches in water-colour, and a few in oil. Twenty-two of these, in water-colour and Indian ink, are in the collection at South Kensington, and many of them are impressive. The influence of Girtin, noticeable in Constable's earlier efforts, is here paramount and unmistakable, the essential qualities of the scenery being broadly and boldly—but not literally—expressed. Not the least of Constable's contributions to landscape painting is his perception of the local character of sky and cloud, and his consequent representation of their actual and varying forms as part of his pictures. In these Lake sketches he gives the further fact, which found its fullest exponent in Turner, that cloud forms—everywhere moulded by earth as well as heaven—assume, in mountain districts, a more intimate and visible relation to earth's



*Oil Painting*

DEDHAM VALE

*National Gallery*

To face page 20





outline. The student will do well to linger over this group of drawings. In them he will find an intuitive understanding and broadness of sympathy not always apparent in Constable's later work. But susceptibility, serviceable for a sketch, may prove an insecure foundation for finished and elaborate work, and vague feeling united to the style of another is insufficient for the purposes of creative art. Either for these or other reasons, Constable appears to have judged the work inadequate, for none of these sketches was ever developed into a large picture. To account for this, Leslie quotes a remark of the artist's to the effect that he was depressed by the solitude of mountainous districts, and surmises that his genius was only at home in a landscape embracing elements of human association.

In the two following years, Constable exhibited some of the results of this excursion at the Royal Academy. In 1807, *A View in Westmoreland, Keswick Lake*, and *Bow Fell*; in 1808, *Borrowdale, A Scene in Cumberland and Windermere Lake*. His time during the year 1807 was largely occupied in making copies of family portraits, chiefly from originals by Sir Joshua Reynolds, for the Earl and Countess of Dysart. Without doubt this copying was undertaken, primarily, as a means of livelihood, but the issues of the task were far-reaching.

Mr. C. J. Holmes, who has made a valuable estimate of the artist's position at this period, points out that the oil studies made by him during his tour in the Lakes differ fundamentally from the water-colours. The latter, as already indicated, are forceful, Girtinesque compositions, in which chiaroscuro is used broadly, and colour is conventionally modified. The oil sketches, on the other hand, are carefully worked, exactly coloured, and strikingly realistic in treatment. For developing those bright, freshly-coloured studies into finished pictures, the artist of the period was without model or precedent; and it is Mr. Holmes' belief that Fortune, under cover of the Earl's commission, released Constable from a genuine dilemma. In proof of this, he cites the altar-piece painted for Nayland Church in 1809, a single half-length figure of *Christ Blessing the Bread and Wine*, which is, he says, so far removed in pose and general execution from the feebleness of the Brantham altar-piece as to be "a picture absolutely in the manner of Lawrence or Hoppner when most obviously under the influence of their great master." He justly remarks that this advance is sufficient proof of Constable's debt to the portrait-painters of the eighteenth century, and points out that portrait-painting being the one branch of art which had preserved a real technical tradition, was an invaluable exercise for an artist, whose eye for





*Oil Painting*

GOLDING CONSTABLE'S HOUSE, EAST BERGHOLT

*In possession of James Orrick, Esq.*

To face page 22



natural colour and feeling for nature were already developed, but who lacked technical knowledge of the means by which a picture should be constructed. He recounts the artist's experiments in, first, applying to landscape Reynolds' method of painting in monochrome, and merely toning the composition into relation with nature by glazing with translucent or transparent colours; second, in painting in strong colours and modifying by glazing; and how, lastly, dissatisfied with those efforts, he reverted for a while to the manner of an Old Master. "The picture *At East Bergholt, Dawn*, in the possession of Mr. G. A. Phillips, is an interesting and beautiful example of the skill he thus attained. The whole work is practically executed in a delicate transparent monochrome, and no effort is made to represent the real tones and colours of the Suffolk hillside. Gradually, however, more and more natural colour is floated into the monochrome basis. The sketch of *Bergholt Church Porch* (South Kensington, No. 138) illustrates the transition, while in the finished picture at Millbank the change is almost complete. The monochrome foundation still remains, but it has become quite subordinate to the exquisite colour of grey walls, deep grass, and dark foliage lighted by a quiet evening sky. Nature and art at last seem reconciled, and henceforth Constable's work proceeds without any

hesitation in a straightforward and definite course." \* In 1809 he exhibited at the Academy three *Landscapes*, and in 1810 *A Landscape* and *A Churchyard*. The painting of *Dedham Vale*, now in the National Gallery, *Golding Constable's House*, and the *View on the Stour near Dedham*, which form our third, fourth, and fifth illustrations, are all attributed by Mr. Holmes to this period.

Leslie records that Constable's work at this time had not made the least impression on the public, and finds sorrowful comfort in reflecting upon the neglect of the landscapes of Wilson and Gainsborough, and the fact that the very names of Cozens and Girtin are unfamiliar to their countrymen. It is clear, however, that at this period the artist had gained the sympathy and appreciation of fellow artists of renown. Leslie records, in 1810, that Constable and Wilkie were much together at this time, and quotes part of a letter from John Jackson, which shows that, between him and Constable, acquaintance had already ripened into friendship. He further reports that in June 1812 Constable for some time past had been the chosen companion of Stothard on his long walks. The statement is made in connection with a letter of Constable's, written on June 5, describing an excursion on foot, the day before, to Putney,

\* *Constable and His Influence on Landscape Painting.* C.:J. Holmes.



*Oil Painting*

ON THE STOUR NEAR DEDHAM

*South Kensington*

To face page 24



Wimbledon Common, Coombe Wood, and Richmond Park, which produced a sketch of Coombe Wood that he (Leslie) has seen, made while his butterfly nets engrossed the attention of the older and more eminent artist.



## CHAPTER III

### CONSTABLE'S LIFE, 1811-1817.

IN 1811 Constable sent to the Academy two pictures, *Twilight* and *Dedham Vale*, and to the British Gallery *A Church Porch*. In the same year, on hearing that the directors of the British Institution had given three thousand pounds for a painting by West, his mother wrote to him: "In truth, my dear John, though in all human probability my head will be laid low long ere it comes to pass, yet, with my present light, I can perceive no reason why you should not, one day, with diligence and attention, be the performer of a picture worth three thousand pounds." But as we know the writer of the letter to have been, at this time, in agreement with her husband in desiring Constable to confine his efforts to portraiture, it is possible that the favourable forecast was prompted, in some degree, by maternal anxiety. It seems to have been generally known among the artist's friends that his health at this

period was flagging, and, the cause of the indisposition being recognised, the patient was plied with remedies. His age was thirty-five; eleven years earlier, in 1800, he had first met—as a little girl—Maria Bicknell, on whom his affections had been lastingly bestowed. She was the grand-daughter of Dr. Rhudde, rector of Berg-holt, and daughter of Charles Bicknell, solicitor to the Admiralty, and her relatives offered strenuous opposition to an attachment which was now mutual and ripening with the years. Mr. Bicknell, it appears, might not persistently have rejected Constable's proposals, had it not been that his daughter was expected to inherit a considerable fortune from her grandfather, who was very rich. But Dr. Rhudde's reasonable antagonism to a suitor ill-qualified in regard to prospects and income, was augmented by the fact that he was on bad terms with Golding Constable.

Leslie gives, as the first letter of a correspondence between the lovers destined to extend over a period of five years, one from Miss Bicknell expressing to Constable her solicitude at the "melancholy account" he has given her of his health, and her conviction of the necessity of abiding by her father's decision without reference to her own desires. It is clear that Constable must, at this time, have formally renewed his petition, for this letter is followed, two days later, November 4,

1811, by a second : “ To Mr. John Constable, Spring Grove.—I have received my father’s letter. It is precisely such a one as I expected, reasonable and kind ; his only objection would be on the score of that necessary evil—money. What can we do ? I wish I had it, but wishes are vain ; we must be wise, and leave off a correspondence that is not calculated to make us think less of each other. We have many painful trials required of us in this life, and we must learn to bear them with resignation. You will still be my friend, and I will be yours. Then, as such, let me advise you to go into Suffolk ; you cannot fail to be better there. I have written to papa, though I do not, in conscience, think he can retract anything he has said ; if so, I had better not write to you any more, at least till I can coin. We should both of us be bad subjects for poverty, should we not ? Even painting would go on badly ; it could hardly survive in domestic worry. I hope you have done a good deal this summer ; Salisbury, I suppose, has furnished some sketches. You are particularly fortunate in possessing the affectionate esteem of so kind and excellent a man as Mr. Watts, whose wishes you must consult on this most important point. Remember, dear sir, if you wish to oblige me and all your friends, it must be by taking care of your health. Adieu, and think me always sincerely yours, M. E. B.” The

nature of her lover's response to this may be surmised from a third letter, dated December 1811 : " You grieve and surprise me by continuing so sanguine on a subject altogether hopeless. I cannot endure that you should harbour expectations that must terminate in disappointment. I never can consent to act in opposition to the wishes of my father ; how then can I continue a correspondence wholly disapproved of by him ? He tells me that I am consulting your happiness as well as my own by putting an end to it. Let me then entreat that you will cease to think of me. Forget that you have ever known me, and I will willingly resign all pretensions to your regard, or even acquaintance, to facilitate the tranquillity and peace of mind which is so essential to your success in a profession, which will ever be in itself a source of continued delight. You must be certain that you cannot write without increasing feelings that must be entirely suppressed. You will, therefore, I am sure, see the impropriety of sending me any more letters. I congratulate you on your change of residence. It is, I think, a very desirable situation. Farewell, my dear sir, and ever believe me your sincere and constant well-wisher, M. E. B."

A letter written to Constable by his father on the 31st of the same month was scarcely calculated to cheer his despondency. " Dear John, your present prospects

and situation are far more critical than at any former period of your life. As a single man, I fear your expenses, on the most frugal plan, will be found quite equal to the produce of your profession. If my opinion were asked, it would be to defer all thoughts of marriage for the present. I would farther advise a close application to your profession, and to such parts as pay best. At present you must not choose your subjects, nor waste your time by accepting invitations not likely to produce future advantages. When you have hit on a subject, finish it in the best manner you are able, and do not in despair put it aside and so fill your room with lumber. I fear your great anxiety to excel may have carried you too far above yourself, and that you make too serious a matter of the business, and thereby render yourself less capable; it has impaired your health and spirits. Think less, and finish as you go. Be of good cheer, John, as in me you will always find a parent and a sincere friend. At your request, you may expect to see your sister at No. 63 next Thursday afternoon." The visitor whose arrival is here predicted was Constable's youngest sister Mary, who remained with her brother for about five months. Before the end of her visit, in one particular at least, his trials seem to have been lightened. We find him writing to Miss Bicknell: "Let me beg of you to continue to

cheer my solitude with your endearing epistles; they are next to seeing you and hearing you speak," and regularly reporting to her the chief events of his days. To the Exhibition, in 1812, of which he promises some account in a later letter, he has sent four pictures—*Flatford Mill*, *A View of Salisbury*, and two small ones. He is copying a portrait for Lady Heathcote. He has called on Dr. Rhudde, in Stratton Street, and been courteously received; and West has spoken warmly to him of his picture of Flatford Mill and of his general achievement in painting. On May 6 he writes: "I have made two hasty visits to the Exhibition. The portraits by Lawrence and Owen are very excellent . . . and Turner has another, a scene among the Alps with Hannibal and his army. It is so ambiguous as to be scarcely intelligible in some parts (and those the principal), yet as a whole it is novel and affecting."

In the spring of the same year Constable became again unwell, and was advised to go into the country. On May 24 he wrote to Miss Bicknell: "I am still looking towards Suffolk, where I hope to pass the greater part of the summer; as much for the sake of study as on any other account. You know I have always succeeded best with my native scenes. They have always charmed me, and I hope they always will. I have now a path marked out very distinctly for myself,



and I am desirous of pursuing it uninterruptedly . . . I am getting on with my picture for Lady Heathcote. Lady Louisa Manners has a wretched copy by Hoppner from Sir J. Reynolds, which she wishes me to repaint; so that I fear it must be at least a fortnight or three weeks before I can get into Suffolk. My friend John Fisher is half angry with me because I will not pass a little time with him at Salisbury; but I am determined not to fritter away the summer if I can help it. I will quote part of his letter (which he has followed to town) that you may see what an enthusiast he is: 'We will try and coax you here, dear Constable, by an account of the life we will lead. We will rise with the sun, breakfast, and then set out for the rest of the day. If we tire of drawing we can read or bathe, and then home to a short dinner. We will drink tea at the Bensons', or walk the great aisle of the cathedral, or, if the maggot so bites, puzzle out a passage or two in Horace. I think this life of Arcadian or Utopian felicity must tempt you.' I believe there are more exhibitions than usual open at this time. I have been most gratified at Wilkie's." Fisher, afterwards Archdeacon, was the eldest son of the Master of Charterhouse, and at this time chaplain to his uncle, the Bishop of Salisbury. He was Constable's junior by sixteen years, but a close friendship





*Oil Painting*

A VILLAGE FAIR

*South Kensington*

To face page 32



had been formed between the two men, and the letters show him as the possessor of discriminating taste and a friend of rare loyalty and tenderness. Fisher was the first of Constable's contemporaries to discern the quality of the artist's work, and he showed the courage of his convictions by sparing neither purse nor pains in his interest at a time when general lack of appreciation made sympathy invaluable. It is not necessary to enter upon the details of services rendered, because henceforth the name of this friend is interwoven with Constable's actions and artistic achievement; wherever his influence appears, it is, manifestly, exercised for good.

From this point, a constant interchange of letters between Constable and Miss Bicknell appears to have taken place, and, unless otherwise stated, quotations from the artist's letters should be considered throughout the chapter as drawn from their correspondence. One, on June 6, chronicles the long walk with Stothard, to which allusion has already been made. June 10 tells that the Bishop and Mrs. Fisher had been to Constable's rooms the day before, that the portrait of the Bishop was completed to their satisfaction, and a commission had been accepted to make a copy of it for the palace at Exeter. Moreover, during their call, Mrs. Fisher had written to the Marchioness of Thomond an introduc-

tion which should enable Constable to view her fine collection of pictures by Sir Joshua Reynolds. He is going, on the morning he writes, to Pall Mall in connection with a portrait of Lady Louisa Manners, and thence to call on Sir George Beaumont, who wishes to see the Gainsboroughs at Lord Dysart's, and is, in return, to conduct the artist to the Gallery of the Marquis of Stafford. These things delay the writer's visit to Bergholt; yet he pines for the country, having been informed that the trees were never more beautiful than at the present time, and having witnessed their peculiar perfection on his walk with Mr. Stothard to Richmond. On June 15 he writes that he can see no end to his labours in Pall Mall, Lady Louisa is distressed when he talks of discontinuing his employment. He replies to Miss Bicknell's question as to what he has been reading of late: "I have all Cowper's works on my table. I mostly read his letters. He is an author I prefer to almost any other, and when with him I always feel the better for it."

His estimate of the impracticability of getting away from town appears to have been unduly despondent, for we find him six days later writing from East Bergholt, sitting at a window which overlooks fields where the lovers, in past years, have wandered. He reports: "I called at the Rectory on Saturday with my mother.

The Doctor was unusually courteous, and shook hands with me on taking leave. Am I to argue from this that I am not entirely out of the pale of salvation?" And continues: "How delighted I am that you are fond of Cowper. But how could it be otherwise? for he is the poet of religion and nature. I think the world much indebted to Mr. Hayley." A month later he writes that he is living the life of a hermit, though always with a pencil in his hand, and penetrating the heart of nature more deeply than before; in his own phrase, "She has unveiled her beauties to me less fastidiously." But signs of conflict are not wanting; he says, in August, "Many of my friends have urged my leaving a profession so unpropitious; but that you know is impossible." The event is not directly chronicled, but by September 6 it is clear that the friends have met. Constable writes that he is relieved to hear Miss Bicknell has safely arrived at Bognor, though sorrowful at the news of her unwonted depression. He says: "I can only imagine our feelings to have been very similar; but let me believe that much of our present suffering may be the effect of parting; and that, with this fine weather, added to the delightful scenes you are in, you have recovered your usual serenity. I have not resumed my landscape studies since my return. I have not found myself equal to the vivid pencil that landscape

requires. I am going to-morrow to stay a few days at General Rebow's, near Colchester, to paint his little girl, an only child, seven years old; I believe I am to paint the General and his lady at some future time: this is in consequence of my portrait of young Godfrey, which has been much admired."

There is little or no evidence that, with the exception of Fisher, any one in Constable's immediate circle regarded his landscape work seriously at this time. His two portraits of the Bishop of Salisbury, and one of Mr. Watts, had given much satisfaction. On November 30 his mother wrote: "Fortune seems now to place the ball at your foot, and I trust you will not kick it from you. You now so greatly excel in portraits that I hope you will pursue a path the most likely to bring you fame and wealth, by which you can alone expect to obtain the object of your fondest wishes." At this distance of time it is difficult to imagine the position of the friends who regarded Constable as a portrait-painter and now reiterated their advice in the hope that love, at last, had rendered him amenable. But, on the other hand, it is probable that we do not bear the facts of the situation sufficiently in mind. Restless and unsettled during these years, he was manifestly being incapacitated for his best work. Even Miss Bicknell felt constrained to write: "You will allow others,



without half your abilities, to outstrip you in the race for fame, and then look back with sorrow on time neglected and opportunities lost." It was not till two years later, 1814, that he was able to sell any of his landscapes, and meanwhile an assured income appeared the first step towards marriage. It is unlikely that the artist himself wavered in his choice, but he seems to have listened to the voice of worldly wisdom and reaped a reward. On June 30, 1813, he writes: "When I last had the happiness of seeing you, my dearest Maria, I had fixed a day for going into Suffolk. I was, however, prevented by a call upon me for portraits; for I assure you, my reputation in that way is much on the increase. One of them, a portrait of the Rev. George Bridgman, a brother of Lord Bradford, far excels any of my former attempts in that way, and is doing me a great deal of service. My price for a head is fifteen guineas; and I am tolerably expeditious when I have fair play at my sitter. I have been much engaged for Lady Heathcote, who seems bent on serving me. My pictures of herself and her mother occupy either end of the large drawing-room in Grosvenor Square; they have magnificent frames and make a great dash. She is to bring me a handsome boy at the Christmas holidays. She has a little dance on Friday, when my pictures will be seen for the first time publicly. I am now leaving London for



the only time in my life with my pockets full of money. I am entirely free from debt and have required no assistance from my father."

Yet, with every allowance for the signs and effects of emotional agitation for which drudgery had proved the right remedy, there had all the time been a reality of quiet achievement, underlying superficial disturbance, which his friends seem hardly to have appreciated. In May of 1813 he had sent to the Academy *Landscape, Boys Fishing*, and *Landscape, Morning*, both of which the President informed him were considered by the Council to show an advance upon his former work, and of one of these Fisher wrote, on June 14, from the Palace, Salisbury: "I have heard your great picture spoken of here, by no inferior judge, as one of the best in the Exhibition. It is a great thing for one man to say this. It is by units that popularity is gained. I only like one better, and that is a picture of pictures, the *Frost*, by Turner. But, then, you need not repine at this decision of mine; you are a great man, and, like Buonaparte, are only to be beaten by a frost." In 1814 he had the good fortune to sell two of his landscapes: a small one, which had been exhibited at the British Gallery, to Mr. Allnutt,\* and a larger one, *The Lock*, to

\* Leslie was told by Mr. Allnutt that Constable, in doing him a service in later years, had said that he had long been under an

Mr. James Carpenter. He sent this year to the Academy *A Ploughing Scene in Suffolk* and *A Ferry*.

This summer and autumn Constable spent in Suffolk, and he wrote, on September 18, that he has "made some landscapes that are better than usual." This temperate phrase includes *Boat-building*, which was painted entirely out of doors, and exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1815. The subject of the picture is the building of a barge in the stocks on Flatford Meadows; behind is the river Stour and the fields of the farther bank. The colour scheme is quiet and restrained, but its atmospheric radiance ranks it with the works of the master to whom its technique and tradition belonged. Claude's task of rendering light from a sun low in the heavens was easier, but it was seldom more perfectly performed. In the *Boat-building* no bright colour is used—the general serenity of effect is undisturbed; but nevertheless the air is tremulous with heat, and penetrated with sunshine. Though the picture has not the more obvious force of the artist's maturity, its delicacy of tone and execution render it one of the most delightful of his works. The summer also produced the notable *Study of Flowers* and the *Cart and Horses* of

obligation he wished to acknowledge; for Allnutt in buying the first picture he sold to a stranger had encouraged him to persist in his profession in the face of opposition from his friends.

our illustration: these, as well as the *Boat-building*, are in the collection at South Kensington. The *Dedham Vale*, in the same collection, of which a reproduction is given, is attributed to this period. This, unlike the *Cart and Horses*, which showed a growing feeling for positive colour and contrast of light and shade, has much in common with the *Boat-building*. In subject and colour-scheme it is closely related to the *Dedham Vale* of 1802, but in general treatment its advance on the early work is easy to recognise. The valley of the Stour, with the tower of Dedham Church and Harwich Harbour in the distance, are again represented from the higher ground at Langham. But the foreground is more satisfactory, the feeling of space more fully given; spiritually, the whole conception has been deepened and enlarged. Its range is wide, and its tranquil grasp of earth and sky so inclusive that the earlier painting appears, by contrast, a transcript. Yet the picture has one characteristic which, because it is apt to appear throughout Constable's work, deserves perhaps to be mentioned here. The cow and the scythe-bearing labourer in the foreground, to modern eyes appear irrelevant and worthless. Their introduction is, perhaps, an instance of the negative emphasis, the over-valuation of actuality, to which allusion has been made in the Introductory chapter. Smith, it will be remem-



*Oil Painting*

DEDHAM VALE

To face page 40



bered, had advised Constable never to invent figures for his landscapes, but, if they were required, to await the appearance of actual men and animals. From such recognition of the innate fitness to their surroundings of the inhabitants of each locality, to an over-estimation of their positive value, is but a slight step. That an operative shepherdess, if she were introduced, would be many degrees more intolerable we are ready enough to admit: the cow and the labourer are not positively distracting; we merely feel their position fortuitous and their presence inessential. Remembering Leslie's remark in reference to Constable's distaste for unpeopled districts and his craving for abundant human associations, we can readily imagine the depression that might ensue from a habit of awaiting the advent of such figures in solitary and mountainous places. Besides the *Boat-building* already described, Constable sent to the Academy Exhibition of 1815 *A View of Dedham*, *A Village in Suffolk*, *A Landscape*, *A Sketch*, and three drawings.

In September of 1814 Constable assumed, for the moment, in his private relations, the unaccustomed rôle of preceptor, and wrote to Miss Bicknell: "We can do nothing worse than indulge in useless sensibility." But it seems probable that the severity of the remark was, in part at least, prompted by consciousness of his own



danger; for two months later we find his mother lamenting that his sensitiveness has so markedly increased upon him. And Miss Bicknell writes: "You will be surprised, my dear John, to hear from me again so soon. Indeed, I fear I shall ruin you in postage. But really you have written me such a strange letter that I cannot forbear sending you my sentiments upon it, and I am delighted to find that I am supported in them by Mrs. Constable. It appears strange to me that a professional man should shun society. Surely it cannot be the way to promote his interest. Why you should no longer be anxious for fame is what I cannot understand. It is paying me a very ill compliment. If you wish to remain single it may do very well." On February 23, 1815, she wrote—again from Spring Gardens—"I have received from Papa the sweet permission to see you again under this roof (to use his own words) 'as an occasional visitor.' From being perfectly wretched, I am now comparatively happy." News of this amelioration of the lovers' condition was, however, withheld from Dr. Rhudde; and when, in February of the following year, 1816, he accidentally discovered that the visits were taking place, he contrived to render their plight more distressing than ever. His wrath was expressed to Mr. Bicknell in terms that made his intentions unmistakable; "he considers me no longer



as his granddaughter," Maria Bicknell wrote in direst consternation to her lover. Meanwhile the solace that intercourse in the previous months might have afforded, circumstances, in large measure, had denied. On May 8, 1815, Mrs. Constable had died, and, naturally, her son was at home at the time. A few days later Miss Bicknell also lost her mother. From July to the end of October Constable was at East Bergholt, returning there after a short visit to London early in November. In December his father became seriously ill, and in consequence he remained for the rest of the winter in the country.

The reason for his leaving town in the autumn had been indicated in one of his letters. Miss Bicknell was unwell, and the strain of the long unsettlement appears at last to have told upon her nerves. Her lover had written from East Bergholt in November: "It is my intention to continue here until I have secured such a picture as I intend for the Exhibition. Here everything is calm, comfortable, and good; and I am at a distance from you, which effectually removes the anxious desire I always feel when you are in London to meet you, perhaps too often for each other's comfort, till we can meet for once, and, I trust, for good." And she had replied: "I dare say, my dear John, you are expecting to hear from me, and I am expecting to hear from you,

as your last letter led me to suppose you would write again in a day or two. But it is painting that takes up all your time and attention. How I do dislike pictures ; I cannot bear the sight of them ; but I am very cross, am I not ? You may spare yourself telling me I am very unreasonable, for I know it already. But I cannot be reconciled to your spending month after month in the country. You say you have no expectation of remaining in London for some time. At all events it is pleasant intelligence. But I feel how very often the visits here are distressing. I believe you are right to remain where you are, in a comfortable home, and rendering the declining years of your father happy. Whenever I wish you away I know I do wrong. I wish we could always like what is right. Henceforth I will endeavour." This querulous letter reached Constable about a month before his father was taken ill, and three months later he received the news of Dr. Rhudde's indignation which has already been alluded to.

The prospects of the lovers were now as bad as they could be, and to Miss Bicknell, at least, they seemed hopeless. But her grandfather's action appears to have provided Constable with exactly the stimulus he required. Humble and diffident as he was, his patience was now at an end. He wrote, in response to the news : " Our business is more than ever with ourselves. I am

entirely free from debt, and, I trust, could I be made happy, to receive a good deal more than I do now by my profession. After this, my dearest Maria, I have nothing more to say, than the sooner we are married the better; and from this time I shall cease to listen to any arguments the other way, from any quarter. I wish your father to know what I have written if you think with me." To this letter he received at first no reply, but on his writing again in some anxiety as to the cause of the silence, and suggesting the possibility of making a visit to town, Miss Bicknell wrote, saying that she had had another cold, but that there was not the least cause for anxiety, and she felt it would be unseemly to leave Mr. Constable in his illness! She concludes: "Papa says, if we remain as we are, he has no expectation that the doctor will alter his will. Let us wait any time rather than you should experience the misery of being much in debt, added to having a very delicate wife." Nothing daunted Constable stayed at Bergholt till his pictures for this year's Academy—*A Wheat Field* and *A Wood, Autumn*—were complete, then he brought them with him to town.

He was recalled to Bergholt by the death of his father, which occurred in May (1816), and when—after this event—the family property was divided his share

proved to be £4000. This small accession of wealth probably made him more than ever determined to continue the course of action on which he had previously decided, and henceforth, in comparison with the attitude of earlier years, his deeds are daring. On one of his visits to Spring Grove, in her father's presence, he placed himself beside Miss Bicknell and took her hand in his. "Sir," exclaimed the indignant father, "if you were the most approved of lovers, you could not take a greater liberty with my daughter." "And don't you know, Sir, that I am the most approved of lovers?" was the gallant's unruffled response. But it was Fisher, to whom in August Constable wrote for advice, who ultimately brought the situation to a climax. He wrote: "Osmington, near Dorchester, August 27, 1816. My dear Constable,—I am not a great letter writer, and when I take pen in hand I generally come to the point at once. I, therefore, write to tell you that I intend to be in London on Tuesday evening, the 24th, and on Wednesday shall hold myself ready and happy to marry you. There, you see, I have used no roundabout phrases; but said the thing at once in good plain English. So, do you follow my example, and get you to your lady, and instead of blundering out long sentences about 'the Hymeneal altar,' &c., say that on Wednesday September 25, you are ready to marry

her. If she replies like a sensible woman, as I suspect she is, 'Well, John, here is my hand, I am ready,' all well and good. If she says, 'Yes, but another day will be more convenient,' let her name it, and I am at her service. And now, my dear fellow, I have another point to settle. And that I may gain it, I shall put it in the shape of a request. It is, that if you find upon your marriage your purse is strong enough to make a bit of a *détour*, I shall reckon it a great pleasure if you and your lady will come and stay some time with my wife and me. That lady joins with me in my request. The country here is wonderfully wild and sublime, and well worth a painter's visit. My house commands a singularly beautiful view, and you may study from your very window. You shall have a plate set by the side of your easel, without your sitting down to dinner. We never see company, and I have brushes, paint, and canvas in abundance. . . . I have taken much to my easel and have improved much. Your visit will be of wonderful advantage to me. Tell your lady that I long to be better acquainted with her, as does Mrs. Fisher, and I beg her to use her influence with you to bring you to see,—Yours with sincerity, John Fisher."

As late as September 15, Miss Bicknell's reply remained undecided, and she continued to exercise to the full her feminine privilege of holding simultaneously

contradictory opinions and giving expression to them in consecutive sentences. But the weather was "enchanted," and on October 2, 1816, at St. Martin's in the Fields, by the Reverend John Fisher, she and John Constable were united in marriage. Records of their sojourn at Osmington remain in pencil sketches, now at South Kensington, made in the neighbourhood of Weymouth during November of 1816.



## CHAPTER IV

### CONSTABLE'S LIFE, 1817-1826

FOR several years after their marriage John Constable and his wife lived in a small house in Keppell Street, Russell Square, where his two eldest children (John and Maria) were born. In 1817 he sent to the Academy *Wivenhoe Park, A Cottage, Portrait of Mr. Fisher,* and *A Scene on a Navigable River*. It is probable that the second of these was the *Cottage in a Cornfield* of our illustration, exhibited at the British Gallery in the following year. In combination of natural colour with careful composition, this was the most complete work Constable had as yet produced; the unity of the picture is immediately apparent, though the means by which it is effected are too fully mastered to be at once recognisable. At the side from which it is viewed, and at the back, the cottage rises directly from the field; in front is a small garden, but this is not included in the picture. What is shown is a tiny human habitation



enised in ripening corn which stretches in long level expanse to the distance. The gate into the field is padlocked: a donkey grazing at will before it, and a wagtail sharing with him the security of the lane, serve to show the quietness of the time and place. But in windless sky and sun-baked earth is a stillness that no passer-by may waken. The artist has conveyed the almost slumbrous serenity that, when the corn is ripening, falls with noon upon the fields.

In 1818 Constable sent to the Academy *Landscape, Breaking up of a Shower*, three other Landscapes, and two pencil drawings. The Exhibition of 1819 contained the largest picture he had as yet painted, a canvas more than six feet by four in size. It was at that time entitled a *Scene on the River Stour*, but now is known as *The White Horse*. On this painting Constable set the price of one hundred guineas, exclusive of the frame, a far larger sum than any he had previously asked.\* It was bought by Archdeacon† Fisher. He wrote: "Salisbury, April 27, 1820.—*The White Horse* has arrived safe; it is hung on a level with the eye, the frame resting on the ogee moulding in a western side light, right for the light in

\* This painting was bought by Mr. Agnew, in 1894, for 6200 guineas.

† He had been installed Archdeacon of Berkshire in 1817.



*Oil Painting*

A COTTAGE IN A CORNFIELD

*South Kensington*

To face page 50



the picture. It looks magnificently. My wife says she carries her eye from the picture to the garden and back again, and observes the same sort of look in both." At this date the clearness and brilliancy of colour in the painting was evidently quite remarkable, whereas at the present time it is in no way distinguished by these qualities, being in fact heavy and lifeless. Captain Constable, the artist's son—himself an artist—on seeing the picture after an interval of years, was so shocked by the contrast as to declare the painting now passing as the original to be a copy, or, at best, a replica.\* Mr. Holmes ventures a different explanation of the change that undoubtedly has taken place. He suggests that the opaque pigments, here worked over a strong warm ground, have grown more translucent with time, and consequently the foundation, in a gradual even manner, has obtruded itself and rendered the surface dull and leaden.†

In October of 1819 Constable was summoned to Bergholt formally to take over the four thousand pounds he had inherited from his father, and in November he was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy. In congratulating him, Fisher wrote: "You owe your election to no favour, but solely to your own,

\* *Leslie's Life*. New edition. 1896.

† *Constable and His Influence on Landscape Painting*. C. J. Holmes.

unsupported, unpatronised merits. I reckon it no small feather in my cap that I have had the sagacity to find them out." In this year Mrs. Constable also inherited four thousand pounds. It was a legacy from her grandfather, Dr. Rhudde—and, though small in relation to his fortune—was more than she had dared to anticipate. In 1820 Constable sent to the Academy *A View of Harwich Lighthouse* and *Stratford Mill on the Stour*. The former, of which an illustration is given, is now in the Tate Gallery, and the original pencil sketch of the subject, made in 1815, may be seen at South Kensington. In all his paintings of the sea Constable's limitations, as compared with Turner, are obvious. He attempts no intricacy in wave forms, and his seas are relatively tame. That the storm at its height lay beyond his range is proved by his own description of *Weymouth Bay*.\* Leslie's wife, seeing a proof impression of the mezzotint of this picture, had expressed a desire to possess it, whereupon Constable forwarded it to her, and wrote: "I shall now, to give value to the fragment I send you, apply to it a line from Wordsworth:

'This sea in anger, and that dismal shore.' " †

\* In the Louvre.

† From *Elegiac Stanzas*, suggested by a picture of *Peele Castle in a Storm*, painted by Sir George Beaumont.



*Oil Painting*

HARWICH. SEA AND LIGHTHOUSE

*Tate Gallery, Milthank*

To face page 52











*Oil Painting*

WATER MEADOWS NEAR SALISBURY

*South Kensington*

To face page 53

The sea of the painting is, like the shore, black and dismal, but to modern eyes its anger is not apparent. Nevertheless, Constable's contribution to the development of marine painting has been considerable. He had learnt to represent the reality of an English sky, and therefore, in its quieter and more reflective aspects, he was able to paint the sea in its true colours. In *Harwich* the sky is threatening and the sea is sullen and uneasy. Of *Stratford Mill*, the second of Constable's large canvases, Archdeacon Fisher was again the purchaser. It was destined by him for a certain Mr. Tinney, his solicitor at Salisbury. The price was again one hundred guineas,\* but, considering it below the value of the painting, Fisher, in writing to the artist, alluded to the picture as "our joint present."

The latter part of this summer Constable spent with his friend at Salisbury, and on September 1 he writes thanking him for his hospitality, and says: "My Salisbury sketches are much liked." To this visit it seems reasonable to attribute the painting, now at South Kensington, *Water Meadows, near Salisbury*, of which a tale, told first by Lucas, is even now repeated in Mr. Firth's *Reminiscences*. The subject of the picture is slight; and, having been misplaced among contributions from non-Academicians, it

\* It was sold at the Huth sale for 8500 guineas.

was passed rapidly before the Hanging Committee, on which Constable himself was sitting, and rejected. The carpenter had marked it with a cross, and was laying it aside when he caught sight of the artist's signature. The judges were profuse in their explanations and apologies, but Constable was relentless; the painting had been refused, and out it went. Opinions differ as to the justice of the rejection. The drawing of the trees on the left is weak and the picture lacks force in composition, but it is beautiful in colour and has caught the tranquil spirit of the place. In the same letter, written on September 1, after his return from Salisbury, Constable speaks of having comfortably settled his wife and children in rooms at Hampstead, and expresses his satisfaction in having them out of London during the prevailing excitement in connection with the trial of Queen Caroline. The view looking northwards from Hampstead Heath, now in the Tate Gallery, and known as *The Salt Box*, was painted about this time. The picture merits the praise that critics have bestowed upon it. It is broad in feeling and the colours—of mid-day in midsummer—are strong and natural. Yet the drawing, especially of the sky and clouds, is minute and delicate. Throughout his after life this prospect held a peculiar place in Constable's affections. Hampstead at this time was not suburban, Mrs. Constable





*Oil Painting*

V I E W   A T   H A M P S T E A D   H E A T H

*South Kensington*

To face page 55



and her children were "out of London" when they went to stay there, and the country remained as yet pure and untainted. In the following year (1821) Constable took a small house in Lower Terrace, and his later paintings of the Heath and his water-colour sketches of the locality, in the British Museum, are evidence that it had a peculiar charm for him. His mind was of the type to which boundlessness and solitude prove insupportable unless they have a foreground of homeliness. Yet at Hampstead he did not shrink from size and solemnity; his sketches from the Heath primarily convey a sense of the vastness and infinitude of the natural world encircling the life of the city. A sensitive child who fears the dark will, at times, by shutting his eyes in the security of a lighted room, adventure a dreaded experience; and, if oppression grew, the artist had but to turn to find the brood of buildings flocking dense where the dome of St. Paul's was dark against the eastern sky. Owing to the extreme delicacy of painting in the cloud forms and the distance, it has proved impracticable to obtain an adequate reproduction of *The Salt Box*. *The View of Hampstead Heath* was painted some three years later.

To the Academy Exhibition of 1821, Constable sent four pictures—*Hampstead Heath*, *A Shower*, *Harrow*,



and *Landscape, Noon*. The last, better known as *The Haywain*, was again a six-foot canvas which, according to Leslie, the artist had been encouraged to undertake by Fisher's purchase of his two earlier ventures. This picture, now in the National Gallery (the illustration is taken from the oil sketch at South Kensington) was despatched to the Academy on April 10, and Constable wrote of it to Fisher—"It is not so grand as Tinney's.\* Owing, perhaps, to the masses not being so impressive, the power of the chiaroscuro is lessened, but it has a more novel look than I expected. I have yet much to do to it, and I calculate on three or four days there. I hear of so many clever pictures for the Exhibition, especially by ex-members, that it must be a capital show. They are chiefly historical and fancy pictures. I hear little of landscape, and why? The Londoners, with all their ingenuity, know nothing of the feelings of country life, the essence of landscape, any more than a hackney coach-horse knows of pasture. Collins requested me to return with him to see a landscape by himself for the Exhibition. It was beautifully painted, and I thought the subject might be about the neighbourhood of Bagnigge Wells;† but he named a scene in the most

\* *Stratford Mill*.

† Bagnigge Wells is now the sign of a public-house in King's Cross Road. Bagnigge House was formerly a summer residence of





*Oil Sketch*

THE HAYWAIN

*South Kensington*

To face page 57

romantic glen in Westmoreland as the identical spot he had painted. This, I am sure, will never do as landscape-painting." Of this vagueness resulting from a superficial grasp of the objects to be represented, there is not in the construction of *The Haywain* the remotest trace. The faults of the picture lie rather at the opposite extreme; nothing in it is lightly passed over, everything is emphasised, and a certain want of *motif* results. The sketch, being less elaborated, is in some respects finer than the finished picture; it shows more movement in the trees and sky. A hay-cart with two men in it is fording a shallow stream; in front of a cottage on the left, a woman stoops to fill her pitcher; beyond her, and in the direction the horses are taking, is a lane lying in the shadow of great trees. The middle distance is occupied by meadows with a background of woodland. The boy mounted on the drinking horse, in the foreground of the sketch, is omitted from the finished picture.

In June of this year Constable accompanied Fisher on his Archidiaconal Visitation in Berkshire, and from this journey resulted some ten drawings at South Kensington, and *A Cottage near Reading, High Street Oxford*, and

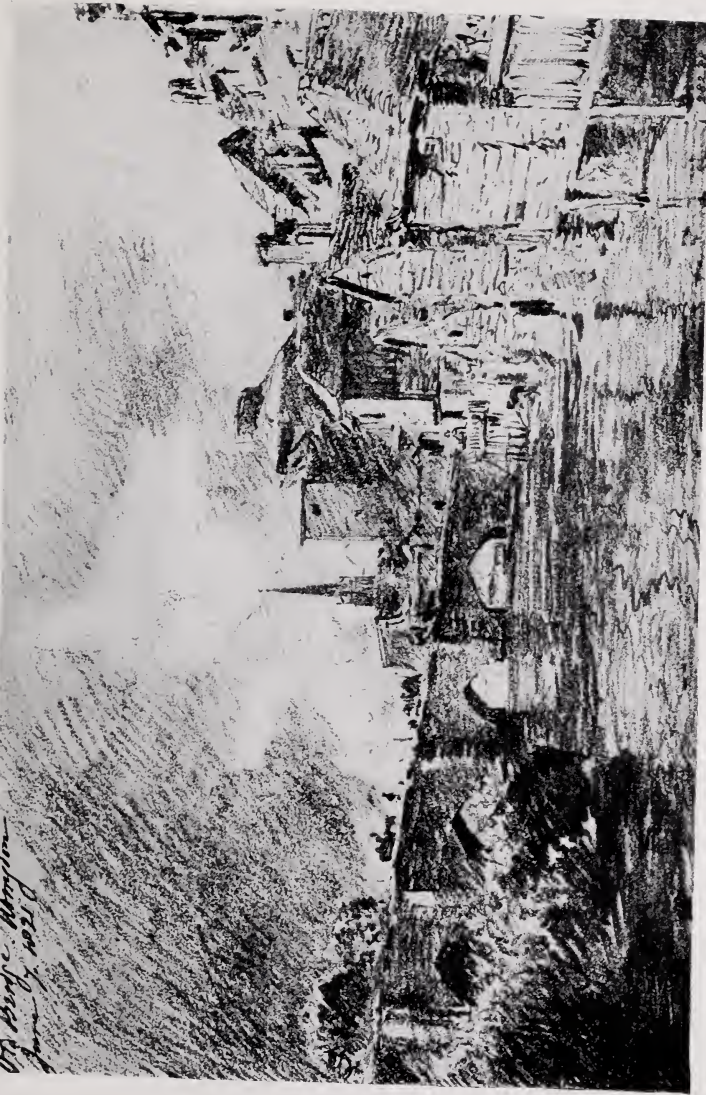
Nell Gwyne, and at this time the grounds were used as a rustic place of entertainment for Londoners. *Old and New London*, by W. Thackeray.

*University College Oxford*, now in the British Museum. Of the subjects at South Kensington three are given here. *Reading from the River* and *The Old Bridge, Abingdon*, are excellent examples of the artist's power in seizing the essentially pictorial qualities of a scene. In the first the outline indication of clouds and rain is of interest. In *The Old Bridge, Abingdon*, the design is finely focused in the white cloud over the church, and the architectural qualities of the spire and bridge are admirably expressed. The whole is a mere memorandum, containing little detail, and made for the artist's own use; but it serves to show how rapidly and easily he could express general and comparative effects. He never in his sketches analyses past the point of immediate serviceableness to his purpose. The low meadows and slow moving river of *The Canal Banks, Newbury*, are hardly distinguishable in character from those of the country Constable best knew and loved.

On July 19 Fisher wrote: "Your picture is hung up in a temporary way at Tinney's till his new room is finished, and excites great interest and attention. How does *The Haywain* look now it has got into your own room again? I want to see it there, for how can one participate in a scene of fresh water and deep noonday in the crowded copal atmosphere of the Exhibition? which is always to me like a great pot of boiling



*Old Bridge, Abington  
June 14, 1921*



*Pencil*

THE OLD BRIDGE, ABINGTON

*South Kensington*

To face page 58





varnish." Constable in his reply, written from 2 Lower Terrace, Hampstead, reports that he is comfortably settled with his family, has cleared a shed in the garden to use as a studio, and works on his large picture at a neighbouring glazier's; the *Haywain*, he says, hangs in one of the drawing-rooms at Keppell Street. On October 23 he writes, again from Hampstead: "I have not been idle, and have made more particular and general study than I have ever done in one summer. But I am most anxious to get into my London painting-room, for I do not consider myself at work without I am before a six-foot canvas. I have done a good deal of skying. I am determined to conquer all difficulties, and that most arduous one among the rest. The landscape-painter who does not make his skies a very material part of his composition neglects to avail himself of one of his greatest aids. Sir Joshua Reynolds, speaking of the landscapes of Titian, of Salvator, and of Claude, says: 'Even their skies seem to sympathise with their subjects.' I have often been advised to consider my sky as a white sheet thrown behind the objects. Certainly if the sky is obtrusive, as mine are, it is bad, but if evaded, as mine are not, it is worse; it must and always shall with me make an effectual part of the composition. It will be difficult to name a class of landscape in which sky is not the keynote, the standard

of scale, and the chief organ of sentiment. You may conceive, then, what 'a white sheet' would do for me, impressed as I am with these notions, and they cannot be erroneous. The sky is the source of light in Nature, and governs everything; even our common observations on the weather of every day are altogether suggested by it. The difficulty of skies in painting is very great, both as to composition and execution; because, with all their brilliancy, they ought not to come forward, or, indeed, be hardly thought of any more than extreme distances are; but this does not apply to phenomena or accidental effects of sky, because they always attract particularly. I may say all this to you, though you do not want to be told that I know very well what I am about, and that my skies have not been neglected, though they have often failed in execution, no doubt from an over-anxiety about them, which will alone destroy that easy appearance which Nature always has in all her movements. How much I wish I had been with you on your fishing excursion in the New Forest. What river can it be? But the sound of water escaping from mill-dams, willows, old rotten planks, slimy posts, and brickwork—I love such things. Shakespeare could make every thing poetical; he tells us of poor Tom's haunts among 'sheep-cotes and mills.' As long as I do paint, I shall never cease to paint such places. They



*Pencil and Wash*

CANAL BANKS, NEWBURY

*South Kensington*

To face page 60









*Water-colour*

OLD HOUSES AT IARNHAM BRIDGE, SALISBURY

*South Kensington*

To face page 61



have always been my delight, and I should indeed have been delighted in seeing what you describe, and in your company—‘in the company of a man to whom Nature does not spread her volume in vain.’ Still, I should paint my own places best; painting is with me but another word for feeling, and I associate ‘my careless boyhood’ with all that lies on the banks of the Stour; those scenes made me a painter, and I am grateful; that is, I had often thought of pictures of them before I ever touched a pencil, and your picture is the strongest instance of it I can recollect.” This letter was answered by Fisher on the following day, October 24, when he wrote telling Constable that he should be alone and disengaged from the 3rd to the 24th of November, and hoped to see him at that time. The invitation was accepted, and the visit bore fruit in further sketches of Salisbury and the surrounding district. Among these was *Old Houses at Harnham Bridge*, a sketch in water-colour dated November 14.

To the Academy of 1822 Constable sent a large picture, *A View on the River Stour near Dedham, Hampstead Heath, Malvern Hall Warwickshire, A View of the Terrace Hampstead*, and *A Study of Trees from Nature*. On the *River Stour* he had expended much pains and thought. On April 13 he had written to Fisher: “I have sent my large picture to the

Academy. I never worked so hard before. The composition is almost totally changed from what you saw. I have taken away the sail, and added another barge in the middle of the picture, with a principal figure, altered the group of trees, and made the bridge entire. The picture has now a rich centre and the right-hand side becomes only an accessory. I have endeavoured to paint with more delicacy." This year he was offered by a Frenchman, who wished to obtain it for an exhibition in Paris, £70, exclusive of the frame, for *The Haywain*. Constable wrote telling Fisher of the offer, saying he was loth to part with the picture as he felt it represented property to his family; but, on the other hand, its exhibition might procure him commissions, and he was sadly in need of money. "On this subject," he says, "I must beg a favour of you; indeed, I can do it of no other person. The loan of £20 or £30 would be of the greatest use to me at this time, as painting these large pictures has much impoverished me. If you can I know you will oblige me. If not, say so. This summer I shall devote to money-getting, as I have several commissions, both landscape and otherwise. But a large picture, and, if possible, a good one, was necessary this year. The next must take its chance. I hope, indeed, and really believe, I have never yet done anything so good as the one now sent." In

spite, however, of this temporary embarrassment, his financial affairs appear to have been steadily improving. In the next few letters various commissions are particularised—one from Mr. Tinney for a picture at one hundred guineas ; and in October he is at work upon two six-foot canvases in the larger house at 35 Charlotte Street, into which he had moved on the death of its tenant, Joseph Faringdon, R.A. A fortnight earlier he had written from Hampstead : “ This is, I hope, my last week here, at least this summer. It is a ruinous place to me ; I lose time here sadly. One of my motives for taking Charlotte Street is to remain longer in London. In Keppell Street we wanted room, and were, \* ‘ like bottled wasps upon a southern wall ’ ; but the happiest five years of my life were passed there.” In spite of his complaint of loss of time, he is able to report that he has made during the summer about fifty studies of skies—“ tolerably large, to be careful.”

At this time Constable was doing his best work, yet the recognition it had received was slight, and a certain bitterness becomes apparent in his writing. “ Could you but see the folly and ruin exhibited at the British Gallery,” he writes to Fisher, “ you would go mad. Vander Velde, and Gaspar Poussin, and Titian, are made

\* Cowper's *Retirement*.

to spawn multitudes of abortions; and for what are the great masters brought into this disgrace? Only to serve the purposes of sale. Holland has sold a shadow of Gaspar Poussin for eighty guineas, and it is no more like Gaspar than the shadow of a man on a muddy road is like himself. I will gladly do all I can for R—— and his picture, but you know I can only send it; I possess no favour in that place.\* I have no patron but yourself, and you are not a grandee; you are only a gentleman and a scholar, and a real lover of the art. I will mention R——'s picture to Young, and this is all that is within my power. Is it not possible to dissuade him from coming to London, where he will be sure to get rid of what little local reputation he may have? But perhaps he prefers starving in a crowd; and if he is determined to adventure, let him by all means preserve his flowing locks. They will do him more service than even the talents of Claude Lorraine, if he possessed them. — shall have his picture when I can find an opportunity of sending it. Had I not better grime it down with slime and soot, as he is a connoisseur, and perhaps prefers filth and dirt to freshness and beauty? I have been to see David's picture of *The Coronation of the Empress Josephine*. It does not possess the common language of the art, much less anything of the oratory

\* The British Gallery.







*Oil Painting*

SALISBURY CATHEDRAL FROM THE BISHOP'S GARDEN

*South Kensington*  
The facade page 65



of Rubens or Paul Veronese, and in point of execution it is below notice ; still I prefer it to the productions of those among our historical painters who are only holding on to the tail of the shirt of Carlo Maratti, simply because it does not remind me of the *Schools*."

The winter of 1822 and the spring of 1823 proved a trying time to Constable. Immediately after Christmas all four of his children were ill, and writing to Fisher on February 1 he reports his eldest son John as being still in a precarious state. Worn out himself, he has not, he says, seen the face of his easel since Christmas, and he asks the Archdeacon to convey, with his apologies, the news to the Bishop of Salisbury that his picture is not, as yet, fit to be seen. Three weeks later he says that he has put a large upright picture in hand, which he hopes to be able to complete, with the Bishop's, in time for the Academy. But, writing on May 9, he reports that, owing to many interruptions, he, after all, has no large canvas at the Exhibition, but his Cathedral, the most difficult landscape subject ever put upon his easel, is there, and looking "uncommonly well." "I have not," he writes, "flinched at the windows, buttresses, etc., but I have still kept to my grand organ colour, and have, as usual, made my escape in the evanescence of the chiaroscuro." In *Salisbury from the Bishop's Garden* the spots of bright pigment, to

indicate sunlight, that afterwards came to be known as "Constable's snow," are first noticeable. The painting is now at South Kensington. It is undoubtedly a brilliant performance, but it bears traces of difficulties encountered by the artist, in certain unpleasantly obvious devices with which he has attempted to meet them. The architecture of the cathedral is adequately and faithfully rendered, but the arching of the foreground trees is altogether beneath the dignity of the central conception.\* It has the bad taste of an apology for the inherent and inevitable, and, by its contrasting flimsiness, throws the stonework into undue relief. In *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows*, exhibited eight years later, no such error of taste is committed. The grandeur of the building is as evident as before, but it is now a component part of the picture. Neither its force nor beauty are lessened, but its unpleasant domination is over, because it is represented in a setting that is adequate. A cathedral could not fitly be given the accompaniments of a cottage, or even of a family home; it is not ordinary and easy of construction, it is extraordinary and monumental.

Among the interruptions complained of in the artist's letter of May 9 was a visit to Suffolk,

\* In the pencil study of the subject (South Kensington, No. 292) the right-hand tree is absent.





*Pencil*

BENTLEY, SUFFOLK

*British Museum*

To face page 67

which produced the pencil sketch of *Bentley*, dated April 21, 1823. With *Salisbury Cathedral from the Bishop's Garden* he had sent to the Academy this year *A Study of Trees*, *A Sketch*, and *A Cottage*. During the summer Constable's children recovered their health, and he, in large measure, appears to have regained his spirits. He writes arranging to visit Archdeacon Fisher on August 19, and on the 29th of that month a letter to his wife, from Gillingham, describes a visit the friends had paid together to Fonthill. On September 30 he is again writing to Fisher from London, and apologises for his delay in formally acknowledging the hospitality which had been shown him. On October 19 he says that by the time the letter he is writing is received at Salisbury he will be with Sir George and Lady Beaumont at Cole-Orton Hall, in Leicestershire.

On the 29th he writes enthusiastically to his wife of the glories of that place. "Only think," he says, "I am now writing in a room full of Claudes (not Glovers but real Claudes), Wilsons, and Poussins." Four days later he reports that he has copied Claude's *Cephalus and Procris*—"a most pathetic picture," and begun to copy a second painting by the same artist. "In the breakfast room," he continues, "hang four Claudes, a Cozens, and a Swaneveldt; the sun glows on them as it sets. In the dark recesses of the gardens, and at the end of



one of the walks, is a cenotaph erected to the memory of Sir Joshua Reynolds, and on it some beautiful lines by Wordsworth." "Sir George," he writes to Mrs. Constable, "rises at seven, walks in the garden before breakfast, and rides out about two, fair or foul. We have had breakfast at half-past eight, but to-day we begin at the winter hour, nine. We do not quit the breakfast table directly, but chat a little about the pictures in the room. We then go to the painting-room and Sir George most manfully sets to work, and I by his side. At two, the horses are brought to the door. I have had an opportunity of seeing the ruins of Ashby, the mountain stream and rocks at Grace Dieu, and an old convent there, Lord Ferrars', a grand but melancholy spot. At dinner we do not sit long; Lady Beaumont reads the newspaper (*The Herald*) to us, and then to the drawing-room to tea, and after that comes a great treat; I am furnished with some portfolios full of beautiful drawings or prints, and Sir George reads a play in a manner the most delightful. On Saturday evening it was *As You Like It*, and I never heard *The Seven Ages* so admirably read before. Last evening, Sunday, he read a sermon and a good deal of Wordsworth's *Excursion*. Some of the landscape descriptions in it are very beautiful. About nine the servant comes in with a little fruit, and a decanter



of water, and at eleven we go to bed. I always find a fire in my room, and make out about an hour longer, as I have everything there, writing desk, &c., and I grudge a moment's unnecessary sleep in this place. You would laugh to see my bedroom ; I have dragged so many things into it, books, portfolios, prints, canvases, pictures." After this description, it is not surprising to learn that the artist's stay was unexpectedly prolonged. He writes to Mrs. Constable on November 9 : " If you, my dearest love, will be so good as to make yourself happy without me for this week, it will, I hope, be long before we part again. But, believe me, I shall be better for this visit as long as I live. Sir George is never angry, or pettish, or peevish, and though he loves painting so much, it does not harass him. You will like me a great deal better than you did. To-morrow Southey is coming, with his wife and daughter." On the 18th, the same note of propitiation is sounded. " The breakfast bell rings. I now hasten to finish, as the boy waits. I really think seeing the habits of this house will be of service to me as long as I live. Every thing so punctual. Sir George never looks into his painting-room on a Sunday, nor trusts himself with a portfolio. Never is impatient. Always rides or walks for an hour or two, at two o'clock ; so will I with you, if it is only in the Square." On the 21st the apology

is definite: "I fear I shall not be able to get away on Saturday though I hope nothing shall prevent me on Monday." It is impossible, he continues, for his wife or children to be more heart-sick than he is at an absence which has now extended over five weeks. He is working incessantly and has hardly been out of doors for ten days, yet his keen sense of enjoyment endures. "Yesterday," he says, "was another very high wind, and such a splendid evening as I never before beheld at this time of the year. Was it so with you? But in London nothing is to be seen, worth seeing, in the natural way." On November 25 he is without doubt to leave Cole-Orton "to-morrow afternoon," and be in London two days later. During his stay, besides the copies of Claude, he had made a sketch from a landscape by Rubens, a large sketch of the front of the Hall, and one of the cenotaph in the garden. Throughout the latter part of his visit he had toiled incessantly, and immediately after his return to London he was seized by an acute form of neuralgia. On December 18 he writes to Fisher that he has been incapacitated and living "on suction" for the past fortnight.

In April of this year Constable came to terms with the Frenchman who had opened negotiations twelve months before. He was to receive £250 for *The Haywain* and another picture, and he ultimately threw

in, for the same price, a small painting of Yarmouth. Fisher who had previously asked to have the refusal of *The Haywain* had written on January 18, "Let your 'Hay-cart' go to Paris by all means. I am too much pulled down by the agricultural distress to hope to possess it. I would, I think, let it go for less than its price for the sake of the *éclat* it may give you. The stupid English public, which has no judgment of its own, will begin to think there is something in you if the French make your works national property. You have long lain under a mistake; men do not purchase pictures because they admire them, but because others covet them." This year Constable exhibited only one picture, *A Boat passing a Lock*. The scene represented is close to Flatford Mill. It was noticed and praised at the Exhibition and was evidently satisfactory to its author, for in informing Fisher of the welcome it has received, he adds: "Its light cannot be put out, because it is the light of nature, the mother of all that is valuable in poetry, painting, or anything else where an appeal to the soul is required. But my execution annoys most of them, and all the scholastic ones. Perhaps the sacrifices made for lightness and brightness are too great, but those things are the essence of landscape, and my extreme is better than white-lead and oil, and *dado-painting*. I sold this picture on the day of opening for

one hundred and fifty guineas, including the frame, to Mr. Morrison. I do hope my exertions may tend towards popularity; but it is you who have so long held my head above water. Although a good deal of the devil is in me, I do think I should have been broken-hearted before this time but for you." The interest of this letter lies rather in its indication of the writer's unusually sanguine outlook, than its estimate of the particular painting of which it treats. His friend replied: "Your last letter is evidently written in a tone of great exultation, and with reason. Your fame and fortune are both advanced." This is a moderate statement of the facts; *The Haywain* and the two other paintings by Constable had been hung in the Louvre at the Salon, and the effect of their appearance is given in a letter from William Brocheden to Constable: "They have created a division in the school of the landscape-painters in France. You are accused of carelessness by those who acknowledge the truth of your effect; and the freshness of your pictures has taught them that though your means may not be essential, your end must be to produce an imitation of nature, and the next Exhibition in Paris will teem with your imitators." A considerable amount of enthusiasm for the paintings had been aroused among French artists who had seen them at the picture-dealer's rooms before

the opening of the Salon, and Count Forbin, the director of the Exhibition, allotted them honourable places from the first ; yet a few weeks later he had them removed to a still more prominent position in the principal room, and in January of the following year Constable was informed that Charles X. on his visit to the Gallery had awarded him a gold medal.

In the spring of this year the artist spent some time with his family at Brighton. He disliked the place heartily and his antagonism is freely expressed in his letters. The town, he says, on May 29, "is the receptacle of the fashion and off-scouring of London." The magnificence and the sound of the sea is overpowered by a tumult of coaches, gigs, and flies, and "the beach is Piccadilly or worse by the seaside." In June he returned to London with John Dunthorne, the son of his old friend the glazier at Bergholt, who was temporarily acting as his assistant. Mrs. Constable and the children remained at Brighton, and while he was in town the artist kept a journal which at intervals he forwarded to his wife. In this he enters, "June 16, a French gentleman and his wife called ; they were much pleased, could talk a little English, and we got on very well. He ordered a little picture, and wished to know whether I would receive any commissions from Paris, where he said I was much known and esteemed, and if



I would go there the artists would receive me with great *éclat*." "June 21, Collins called ; he says I am a great man at Paris, and that it is curious they speak there of only three English artists, namely, Wilkie, Lawrence, and Constable." "June 22, had a letter from Paris. Mr. Arrowsmith \* informed me of the safe arrival of my pictures, and how much they were admired ; he talks of coming again the end of next month ; I shall be ready for him. His letter is flattering, but I have no wish to go to Paris." On December 17 he writes to Fisher describing the good fortune which has befallen his works in France, and says: "I am much indebted to the artists for their alarum in my favour ; but I must do justice to the Count (Forbin), who is no artist I believe, and thought that as the colours are rough they should be seen at a distance. They found the mistake, and now acknowledge the richness of texture and attention to the surface of things. I learnt yesterday that the proprietor asks twelve thousand francs for them. They would have bought one, *The Waggon*, for the nation, but he would not part them. He tells me that the artists much desire to purchase and deposit them in a place where they can have access to them. Reynolds is going over in June to engrave

\* The dealer who had procured Constable's paintings for the Salon.







*Oil Painting*

DEDHAM LOCK, OR THE LEAPING HORSE

*Diploma Gallery, Burlington House*

them, and has sent two assistants to Paris to prepare the plates. He is now about *The Lock* and he is to engrave the twelve drawings."

In January of 1825 he writes to Fisher that he is sending some of his Brighton oil sketches in the hope that such reminder of the sea may cheer Mrs. Fisher, who at the time was seriously unwell. These sketches had resulted from the artist's frequent journeys to Brighton, which, during the years 1824 and 1825, were necessitated by the continued ill-health of his eldest son. In the same letter he says that a six-foot canvas, launched with all his usual anxieties, is upon his easel. This picture, which was sent with two other landscapes to the Academy in the following April, was *Dedham Lock; or, the Leaping Horse*. The painting is now to be seen at the Diploma Gallery, Burlington House, and there is a fine full-sized sketch of the subject at South Kensington. In the foreground a barge is being towed up the river, and the horse pulling it, ridden by a boy, is in the act of leaping a barrier fixed across the path. The vigour and movement of the picture are immense. The resistless, onward sweep of sky and water bespeak a potentiality of which the life and strength of the animal is but an off-shoot. In the direct and simple representation of an incident in rural life, the artist has communicated the reality of energy and of force with a

success not always attained by Watts or Rodin when they essay the more ambitious task of abstractly conceiving a quality and representing it by means of a type. Yet even at a height such as this Constable's taste errs and allows him to blunder in a way that is childish. The sketch at South Kensington contains the essentials of the completed picture, and all the onward movement of the composition directs and leads the eye to the horse. Yet in the sketch (and in the picture itself at the time of its exhibition) instead of springing clear and free against the sky line, the animal appears to be leaping into a willow with which he is confronted within a yard or two of the fence he clears. The position of the tree was altered by the artist on September 7, when the painting returned to him from the Academy, unsold; it was then placed behind the horse, clear of the path. The new arrangement is, somewhat inadequately, noted by the critics as "an improvement!" The two smaller landscapes sent to the Exhibition were sold to Mr. Francis Darby of Coalbrookdale, Constable being specially gratified at their finding a purchaser who was completely unknown to him and, therefore, uninfluenced by personal feeling. During this summer an exhibition of works of living artists was organised by the directors of the British Institution. To this the generosity of Archdeacon

Fisher and Mr. Tinney enabled Constable to contribute *The White Horse* and *Stratford Mill*. And in response to an application from the Mayor of Lisle *The White Horse* was afterwards sent to an exhibition in that city at which it won for Constable the second gold medal awarded to him by the authorities of France.

During much of this year Mrs. Constable and the children remained at Brighton, as the cause of anxiety in their boy's health continued. In August Fisher wrote from Osmington asking that the invalid might be brought down by easy stages and entrusted to his care, promising that he should have the best advice the country could give, sea air, sea bathing, and good food. "As for money matters," he wrote, "do not make yourself uneasy. Write for anything you want, and send me any picture, in pledge, that you think proper. Your family or yourself shall have the difference whenever it is called for. . . . You want a *staff* at present; lean upon me *hard*." Throughout the summer and autumn of this year Constable in his letters alludes to the difficulties presented by his picture, *The Opening of Waterloo Bridge*, which for some time past had been upon his easel. In November he writes to Fisher that it shall certainly be completed in time for the next Exhibition, for, "like a blister, it

has begun to stick closer and closer," and disturb his rest at night. After experiencing in regard to it alternations of hope and despair, he was obliged to set the subject aside, and it was not until seven years later that it was finally completed.



## CHAPTER V

### CONSTABLE'S LIFE, 1826-1837

*Waterloo Bridge* being set aside, Constable turned his attention to *The Cornfield*. On April 8 he wrote to Fisher, "I have dispatched a large landscape to the Academy, upright, of the size of *The Lock*, but a subject of a very different nature : inland cornfields, a close lane forming the foreground ; it is not neglected in any part ; the trees are more than usually studied, well defined, as well as the stems ; they are shaken by a pleasant and healthful breeze at noon :

‘ while now a fresher gale

Sweeping with shadowy gusts the fields of corn,’ &c.

I am not, however, without my anxieties, though I have not neglected my work, or been sparing of my pains." *The Cornfield*, which was presented to the Nation by his friends after Constable's death, and is now in the National Gallery, is perhaps the most

widely known of all his works. It is, within its limits, one of the most perfect. The unusual attention paid to the drawing of the trees has not been wasted; the group upon the left hand side is powerful. In the attitude of the shepherd boy drinking, there is an uncompromising realism that must have shocked the artist's contemporaries. The execution of the picture is masterly, and technically a high level of treatment is maintained throughout the work. Yet, while recognising to the full its harmony and completeness, we must confess it an unsatisfying successor to *The Leaping Horse*. It has, in conception, a certain smugness more suggestive of servility than of imaginative vision. To say this is not to deny the charm of the picture. It is merely to suggest, what in all probability the artist himself most fully recognised, that he here aimed relatively low, and might, judged by this single work, be classed with the man who "seeks a little thing to do, sees it and does it." It is, moreover, likely that in his choice of subject Constable was slightly reactionary. His *Leaping Horse* was unsold, and the completion of *The Opening of Waterloo Bridge* had proved, for the moment, impracticable. Meanwhile, the expenses which had been involved in a second household at Brighton were heavy, and an arrangement with Arrowsmith for sending further



*Oil Painting*

THE CORNFIELD

*National Gallery*

To face page 80



paintings to Paris had abruptly terminated. A second smaller landscape accompanied *The Cornfield* to the Exhibition.

In the spring of this year the family fortunes began to mend. Mrs. Constable and the children were able to return to town, John was sent to Brighton to school, and the artist's favourite brother Abram, to whose bedside he had been hastily summoned in the second week of April, was fairly on the way to recovery. In a letter written to Fisher at the end of the month Constable reports that his wife is now able to be at the breakfast table by eight o'clock, and that immediately after the meal he sets off for the Academy; and in July he writes that he has paid several visits to Lord Pembroke's house and terrace.\* On September 9 he says: "My children are well, and my wife, for her, very tolerable; they are in a small house on Downshire Hill, to which it is an easy walk from home. I have just come back from a day or two at Brighton, where I had been to return my boy to Mr. Phillips. John Dunthorne is still in Suffolk, very busy; his last job is a large sign of the Duke of Marlborough. I have written to hasten him; he is wanted here by myself and others." "November 28. The rumour may have

\* These, now destroyed, are in the foreground of *Waterloo Bridge*.

reached you that I have another boy ; the number of my children is now six, being three of each." A few weeks later he writes again : " My wife is at Hampstead, and both she and the infant are doing well. I am endeavouring to secure a permanent small house there, and have put the upper part of this house \* into an upholsterer's hands to let, made my painting-room warm and comfortable, and have become an inhabitant of my parlours. I am three miles from door to door and can have a message in an hour. I shall be more out of the way of idle callers, and, above all, see nature and unite a town and country life, and to all these things I hope to add a plan of economy."

Constable sent to this year's Academy, *The Marine and Chain Pier at Brighton*, and two smaller paintings, *A Water Mill at Gillingham, Dorsetshire*, and *Hampstead Heath*. The second of these must not be confused with the original of the illustration given—a more finished treatment of the same subject—(No. 1632) in the collection at South Kensington. The picture sent to the Academy is oblong in shape. *The Cornfield* was again exhibited, this time at the British Gallery, and with it *The Glebe Farm*, a work of which Constable had written three months earlier : " My last landscape is a cottage scene with the church at Langham ; it

\* Charlotte Street





*Oil Painting*

GILLINGHAM MILL, DORSETSHIRE

*South Kensington*

To face page 82



is one of my best in colour, fresh and bright, and I have pacified it into tone and solemnity." This picture is now in the National Gallery.

In the summer of 1827, the home for which Constable had been seeking at Hampstead, was found. On Aug. 26 he wrote to Fisher: "We are at length fixed in our comfortable little house in Well Walk, Hampstead, and are once more enjoying our own furniture and sleeping in our own beds. My plans in search of health for my family have been ruinous; but I hope now that our movable camp no longer exists, and that I am settled for life. So hateful is moving about to me, that I would gladly exclaim: 'Here let me take my everlasting rest!' The rent of this house is fifty-two pounds per annum, taxes twenty-five, and what I have spent on it ten or fifteen. I have let Charlotte Street at eighty-two pounds, retaining my two parlours, large front attic, painting-room, gallery, &c. This house is to my wife's heart's content; it is situated on an eminence at the back of the spot in which you saw us, and our little drawing-room commands a view unsurpassed in Europe, from Westminster Abbey to Gravesend. The dome of St. Paul's in the air seems to realise Michael Angelo's words on seeing the Pantheon: 'I will build such a thing in the sky.' We see the woods and lofty grounds of the East Saxons to the north-

east." Two or three of Constable's water-colour drawings of London from Hampstead Heath, now in the British Museum, accord closely in spirit with this description. One in particular, in which, though a shower is passing over St. Paul's on the right, the city lies in broad expanse beneath a sky of untroubled blue, embodies the inclusive and irradiated vision that the words imply.

On January 2, 1828, Constable's fourth son, Lionel Bicknell, was born. After his birth Mrs. Constable was seriously ill, and, though a change to Brighton was suggested, until June she was too unwell to be moved. Meanwhile her father had died, and left to his son-in-law a legacy amounting to close on twenty thousand pounds. Writing to Fisher of this windfall, Constable expressed his immediate intention of settling the money on his wife and children, that thereby Mr. Bicknell's confidence in him should be justified, and he would be free "to stand before a six-foot canvas with a mind at ease, thank God!" But a sorrow, before which poverty and the anxieties of previous years dwindled into insignificance, was already upon him. At Brighton, in June and July, Mrs. Constable seemed to be gaining ground; she returned to Hampstead in August, and there for a short time the improvement continued, but early in October she became worse, and on November 23 she

died of consumption. Her husband never fully recovered from the blow. He had been married for just twelve years, and undoubtedly they had been the happiest of his life. He met the shock with outward dignity and calmness, but with seven children, the eldest still ailing, upon his hands, it is small wonder that the self-distrust and nervousness, which had been the bane of his youth, should to some extent have regained their hold upon him. He took the children back with him to Charlotte Street, merely retaining the house in Well Walk as an occasional residence.

To this year's Academy he had contributed a *Hampstead Heath*, which had been purchased by Chantrey, and the *Dedham Vale* of our illustration.\* The chief interest of the latter lies in its similarity to the picture of the same subject painted in 1802. It goes without saying that, in the twenty-six years intervening between the two works, the artist has gained in facility and execution; but, passing from manner to matter, it is difficult to feel that all the developments are changes for the better. If the group of trees on the right in 1802 was rather uniform and characterless, the leopard-like structure which occupies the foreground in the group of 1828 has less in common with any species of English tree of the writer's acquaintance. Again, the gipsy

\* See reproduction in chapter vi.



encampment in the central foreground must be classed with the most glaring instances of the artist's fortuitous introduction of figures to enhance a pastoral effect. It is refreshing to turn from this subject to the impressionist sketch, *A Summer Afternoon after a Shower*, which was painted about the same time. According to Leslie, the sketch was made by Constable immediately upon alighting from the coach on one of his Brighton journeys, and is the memory of an effect he had seen close to Redhill. In spite of its lack of definition and outline, the painting—now in the National Gallery—is singularly beautiful, and a better subject could hardly be chosen to confute the estimate of Constable's achievement that has been popularised by persons familiar only with such examples as *The Cornfield*. It is no finished, facile painting, but a daring attempt to represent Nature in one of her most exalted and evanescent moods. The artist is here a lover, happy if in recollection he may touch the hem of the garment earth's spirit wore as she passed in splendour before his eyes. Of the same class of painting and of like inspiration are *The Gleaners*—also in the National Gallery—and the brilliant oil sketch of *A Mill near Brighton*, which is now at South Kensington.

On February 10, 1829, Constable was elected an Academician, Turner being among the members of the





*Oil Painting*

A SUMMER AFTERNOON AFTER A SHOWER

*National Gallery*

To face page 86



Academy who called to congratulate him on the event. His pleasure was marred by the consciousness that the distinction had been conferred three months too late. "It has been delayed," he said, "until I am solitary and cannot impart it." It was further qualified by the friction that arose when he paid the formal call, due to the President upon an election. Lawrence made no effort to hide his surprise that a landscape-painter had been preferred before the historical painters of merit whose names were upon the list of candidates, and Constable was provoked to reply that instead of being able to look upon his election in the light of a favour, he regarded it merely as an act of justice. Two months later the artist wrote from Hampstead to Leslie : "Since I saw you I have been shut up here. I have forwarded my picture of *Hadleigh Castle*, which I shall send to Charlotte Street to-morrow morning. Can you oblige me with a call to tell me whether I ought to send it to the Exhibition? I am grievously nervous about it, *as I am still smarting under my election*. I have little enough either of prudence or self-knowledge, as you know, and I am willing to submit to what you and others whom I value may decide. I shall dine with the Dowager Lady Beaumont to-day, and I hope I shall meet you. I could hardly refuse; yet at this time (for I am in the height of agony about my crazy

old walls of the Castle) I could rather wish myself at home." *Hadleigh Castle*, as it appears in the Lucas Mezzotint \* is not a striking picture, and at the time of the Exhibition it was reviewed unfavourably by the critics. Leslie relates, as an eye witness, an incident connected with it which is worthy of repetition. On one of the varnishing days, Chantrey, telling Constable that his foreground was too cold, seized his palette and passed a strong glazing of asphaltum over the front of the picture. "There goes my dew," the artist exclaimed in alarm to Leslie, and, spite of his reverence for the sculptor's authority, he set to work at once to remove the glaze. The only other painting sent by Constable to this year's Exhibition was small and unimportant, *A Cottage*. Possibly because he continued to feel his circumstances depressing and unfavourable to creative work, he this year undertook, in conjunction with David Lucas the engraver, a task which largely occupied him for the remainder of his life—the preparation of his *English Landscape* for publication. The *Liber Veritatis* of Claude had inspired the *Liber Studiorum* of Turner, and the work of his great contemporary seems, in part at least, to have suggested his *Landscape* to Constable. The first series of twenty mezzotints, entitled *Various Subjects of Land-*

\* The present whereabouts of the painting is unknown.



*Oil Painting*

## THE GLEANERS

*National Gallery*

To face page 88





*scape, characteristic of English Scenery, principally intended to display the Phenomena of the Chiar'oscuro of Nature*, was published in 1833, and is thoroughly representative of his works.\*

As a newly elected Academician it was Constable's duty to serve on the Hanging Committee of the Exhibition of 1830. This was to him a particularly difficult and toilsome task; his natural sympathy with the disappointment of rejected candidates being only equalled by his certainty of the utter worthlessness of their contributions. He wrote before the Exhibition to Leslie: "It would amuse you to see how I am beset; I have poets, earls, dukes, and even royalty at my feet; all painted canvas, of course . . . the painters of them all believing they can easily fill the shoes of Lawrence.† Leslie tells that during the arrangement of the pictures, Constable, who was tried by the excessive size of some of the frames, remonstrated with an exhibitor on the point. The younger artist assured him that his frames were specially constructed in imitation of those used by Sir Thomas Lawrence. Constable's retort was sudden: "It is easy," he said, "to imitate Lawrence in his *frames*." On another

\* The details and vicissitudes of this enterprise are treated in a separate chapter.

† The great portrait-painter had died in January of this year.

occasion Leslie and Constable were called on to deal with an artist who, in the hall of the Academy, was abusing the Hanging Committee for the place they had given to his picture. The authorities, he said, were jealous of his achievement, and added in justification of his wrath, "I cannot but feel as I do, for painting with me is a passion." "Yes," rejoined Constable, "and a bad passion." His own contributions this year were *A Dell in Helmingham Park* and *A View of Hampstead Heath*. The *Hampstead Heath* is at South Kensington, and forms the subject of our illustration. As is common in Constable's treatment of this scene, the sky and distance form the most notable features in the picture. The painting as a whole is extremely beautiful, and is one of the artist's most able combinations of the transient atmospheric effects he had represented so successfully in his sketches, with careful drawing and composition.

In January of 1831 Constable was a visitor to the Life Academy. It is the visitor's duty to determine the attitude of the models, and throughout his attendance all his figures were set in accordance with some well-known design. He began with an *Eve* from Raphael, and wrote to Leslie: "Do, dear Leslie, come and see it. I have dressed up a bower of laurel, and I told the students they probably expected a landscape



*Oil Painting*

HAMPSTEAD HEATH

*South Kensington*

To face page 90







*Oil*

SALISBURY  
(*Study for the large Picture*)

National Gallery

To face page 91



background from me. . . . My Garden of Eden cost me ten shillings, and my men were twice stopped, coming from Hampstead with green boughs, by the police." He next set two male figures from *The Last Judgment* of Michael Angelo.

In March Constable was unwell: he habitually overworked in the months immediately preceding the opening of the Exhibition, and this year he was additionally anxious as to the success of the mezzotint series. On March 23 he writes asking Lucas to call, and says: "I have made a great impression on my large canvas. Beechey was here yesterday, and said: 'Why d—n it, Constable, what a d—d fine picture you are making; but you look d—d ill, and you have got a d—d bad cold!' so that you have evidence *on oath* of my being about a fine picture, and that I am looking ill." The picture was *Salisbury from the Meadows*, which has been already mentioned in connection with *Salisbury from the Bishop's Garden*. The illustrations of the subject are taken from the *Study* in the National Gallery and the Lucas mezzotint, the painting itself being now in private hands.\* Both subjects are impressive, but the rainbow of the finished picture forms so completely the central and unifying idea as to make comparison with the sketch (from which it is absent)

\* In the possession of Mrs. Ashton.

almost impracticable. The cross-surmounted spire, outreaching the storm to a sky that is serene, unites the cathedral—monument of the toiling faith of generations—with the bow of covenant in the heavens. In spite of small mannerisms, such as the customary blanched tree introduced on the left, *Salisbury from the Meadows* is a magnificent piece of work and among the greatest of Constable's creations. After his death it was proposed that this painting should be purchased by his friends and presented, as a memorial of him, to the Nation. The idea was, however, over-ruled by those who thought the work too daring to win general favour, and *The Cornfield* was ultimately selected and presented in its stead. At this time of day it is perhaps unnecessary to point out the loss to the public that such timidity has involved. A smaller painting of *Yarmouth Pier* was sent with the *Salisbury* to the Exhibition of 1831.

By the end of October Constable was more unwell, and his depression had increased. He writes to Leslie: "The mischief that has so long been hatching has at length come to a head. Evans \* tells me I must take great care of my health for my children's sake; I much doubt if my life is of any use to them, but I love them, and they love me, so the parting at least will be sad."

\* His doctor.



SALISBURY CATHEDRAL, FROM THE MEADOWS

(From the *Messotint* by David Lucas)



On November 4 he reported himself better, and cites in proof the fact that he is now unconcerned about the introduction of the Reform Bill, which he had anticipated with absurd apprehension during his illness. At this time he has decided to live with his children at Hampstead, and use Charlotte Street merely as an office. But the improvement was short-lived. He wrote, again to Leslie, from Well Walk on December 17: "My sad illness has a good deal returned, and the worst is, that it is accompanied by an attack of acute rheumatism which has quite disabled me. Thank God, this right hand is left me entire; reminding me, if ever I could forget it, of your dear child's surprise at 'the poor gentleman who was all shot away but his hand,'\* but my left side and arm prevented my working by pain and helplessness. Fourteen leeches, however, on that shoulder dislodged part of the enemy, but only that he should make a lodgment in my knee, and now I can't stand."

Early in January of 1832 he writes to Leslie that he and the children are coming to Charlotte Street as soon as the doctor permits him to be moved, and adds: "I am not sorry to have missed the visitorship in the Life this year, and next year I shall be ineligible; my youth being gone, I can hardly stand the fags I lay on

\* On seeing an engraving of an antique fragment.



myself." On the 14th his letter is headed: "From my bed, Charlotte Street." In it he thanks Leslie for his description of the pictures at Petworth, and says: "I remember most of Turner's early works; amongst them was one of singular intricacy and beauty; it was a canal, with numerous boats making thousands of beautiful shapes, and I think the most complete work of genius I ever saw. The Claude I well know; grand and solemn, but cold, dull, and heavy—a picture of his old age. Claude's exhilaration and light departed from him when he was between fifty and sixty, and he then became a professor of the 'higher walks of art,' and fell in a great degree into the manner of the painters around him; so difficult it is to be natural, so easy to be superior in our own opinion." On March 3 he is better, and reports: "I have got my large *Waterloo* beautifully strained on a new frame, keeping every inch of canvas." But, though he is at work, he apologises for being unable to call on Leslie by explaining that the pain in his knee still prevents him from walking the length of the street. On April 24 *The Opening of Waterloo Bridge* has been dispatched, and he is restless and uneasy as to its reception. Leslie's appreciation of the picture is worth quoting in full. He says: "In the *Waterloo Bridge* Constable had indulged in the vagaries of the palette-knife (which he used with great



dexterity) to an excess. The subject\* challenged a comparison with Canaletti, the precision of whose execution is wonderful, and the comparison was made to Constable's great disadvantage; even his friend, Mr. Stothard, shook his head and said: 'Very unfinished, sir'; and the picture was generally pronounced a failure. It was a glorious failure, however. I have seen it often since it was exhibited, and I will venture to say that the noon-day splendour of its colour would make almost any work of Canaletti, if placed beside it, look like moonlight." The present brilliancy of the picture is great, and one or two of the tales that cling to it go far to prove the outstanding presence of the quality Leslie emphasises. The Hanging Committee of the Academy placed it next to a grey sea-piece by Turner; and while Constable took advantage of the last days before the Exhibition opened to heighten the splendour of his work, Turner felt constrained to enter a protest. He walked quickly up to his picture and placed a bright spot of red lead upon the foreground. There should surely have been no mistaking the meaning of the hint so delicately offered. "Turner has been here," said Constable, "and fired a gun." "A coal," said Cooper, "has bounced across the room from

\* The King is embarking at Whitehall Stairs (June 18, 1817) and the river is alive with gaily decorated barges.

Jones' picture, and set fire to Turner's sea." The subdued tones prevailing in Turner's picture gave added brilliancy to the single spot of intense colour, and Constable's gala-day lost something of its glitter by the contrast. But the Hanging Committee were imperturbable, or perhaps too dense to see what was amiss, and, "in the last moments allowed for painting, Turner glazed the scarlet seal he had put upon his picture, and shaped it into a buoy." \* We are further assured by Leslie that soon after Constable's death the picture was toned to the aristocratic taste of the period by a coat of blacking, laid on with water and secured with mastic varnish! But if the tale be more than a fiction enwrapping a truth, the damage must have been skillfully repaired, for no trace of it is apparent in the painting which is now in the possession of Sir Charles Tennant. The foreground on the left—trees, terraces, and front of a Georgian house—and the distant water are excellently treated. The sky is noble and impressive; but, as a whole, the composition is not successful. Instead of being one picture, it contains the material of three. The subject is *The Opening of Waterloo Bridge*, and consequently the bridge with the buildings above it, though in the background of the picture, is repre-

\* The room in which the paintings were hung was a small one at Somerset House; the tale is told in *C. R. Leslie's Reminiscences*.

sented in detail. The middle distance is occupied by a beautiful and restful stretch of river. The foreground is crowded with boats and barges, which are rendered, individually, with an emphasis and insistence that is wearisome. Moreover, the avenue and stairway to the river is spaced with toy sentinels. Turner's *Entrance to the Scheldt*, which is in the same collection, offers an interesting contrast to *Waterloo Bridge*, and it is impossible not to wish that Constable, when he decided on this difficult subject for pictorial representation, had either adopted his contemporary's expedient of running a deep band of shadow across the objects in the foreground, and thus at once carried the eye to the bridge, or, settling upon the embarkation as his theme, allowed distance and atmosphere their rightful influence on the architecture. At least four large sketches for this picture are in existence, and one of the best is on the staircase leading to the Diploma Gallery at Burlington House. With *Waterloo Bridge* Constable exhibited *A Romantic House, Hampstead, Moonlight*; *Sir Richard Steele's House, Hampstead*; and four drawings.

Disappointment and his own ill-health were not the heaviest trials that this year brought upon Constable. In June his eldest daughter—now his constant companion—was dangerously ill. When she recovered, in August, Archdeacon Fisher died at Boulogne, and John

Dunthorne, the younger, lay dying. Dunthorne had come to stand to the artist almost in the relation of a son, and, telling Leslie, in June, that the young man's heart disease was incurable, Constable had said: "He cannot long remain to me. I do not contemplate a happy old age even if I should attain it." On November 13 he returned to Well Walk from Dunthorne's funeral to write "No one can supply his place to me." Yet the year that saw the close of these relationships gave birth to another hardly less valuable; an acquaintance, which quickly ripened into friendship, between the artist and George Constable of Arundel.

To the Academy of 1833 Constable contributed *Englefield House, Berkshire, Morning; A Heath, Showery, Noon*; \* *Cottage in a Cornfield, Sunset*; and three water-colour drawings. Of the first he had made a picture from an unpromising subject—Lady Morley, seeing it upon his easel, had exclaimed: "How fresh, how dewy, how exhilarating!"—and the secret of its success is best expressed in his own words: "S—— told me," he writes, "it was 'only a picture of a house and ought to have been put in the Architectural Room'; I told him it was 'a picture of a summer morning including a house.'"

On June 11 he wrote to Leslie, "Remember I play the

\* Probably the *View at Hampstead* of the illustration.



*Oil Painting*

A VIEW AT HAMPSTEAD

*National Gallery*

To face page 98







part of Punch on Monday at eight, at the Assembly Room at Hampstead," referring to his first experiment as a lecturer. His subject, afterwards expanded at the Royal Institution, was *The History of Landscape-Painting*, dealt with in a subsequent chapter. In August he visited Suffolk with his boys. The two eldest shortly after were sent to school at Folkestone.\* Until this year they had been taught by a resident tutor, with whom Constable had parted regretfully on the ground of expense, and he fretted considerably at their absence. On December 20 he writes with glee to George Constable, "My sons are returned from Folkestone for Christmas," and from that point his letter assumes the complexion of paternal pride. The earlier portion of this letter and two preceding it, written in the same month, to George Constable, dealt with the buying and selling of pictures. In the first, the artist, who has been asked by George Constable the price of a replica of *Salisbury from the Bishop's Garden*, and the value of a Cuyp he has sent, replies: "I would not have kept you so long in suspense, had it been in my power to do otherwise; but I can't get well. I have been so long in a disordered state of health, and my spirits are not as they used to be. I have not an idea that I shall be able to

\* The beautiful water-colour in the British Museum, *Folkestone from the Sea*, is dated October 16 of this year.

part with the *Salisbury* ; the price will of necessity be a very large one, for the time expended on it was enormous for its size. I am also unwilling to part with any of my standard pictures, they being all points with me in my practice, and will much regulate my future productions, should I do any more large works. The picture by Cuyp which you send is agreeable, and its colour and sunshine will no doubt please many ; I wish not, however, to add any more old pictures to my stock. If you wish for any information about its money value, I can get some professional friends to see it ; of that I am no judge ; I only know *good* things from *bad* in art, and that goes but little way in being of use to my friends."

On January 20, 1834, Constable wrote to Leslie, who was in America : " I have been sadly ill since you left England, and my mind has been so much depressed, that I have been scarcely able to do any one thing, and in that state I did not like to write to you. I am now, however, busy on a large landscape ; I find it of use to myself though little noticed by others. Still, the trees and the clouds seem to ask me to try and do something like them. Poor John has been very ill ; walking in his sleep at school he fell and brought on erysipelas ; he was six weeks in bed, and on his return to Hampstead for the holidays he took a rheumatic fever, and was

confined for a month. I do not think I shall send the boys again to Folkestone. Bonner\* is still with me, and Alfred and Lionel are getting on in their studies with him . . . I have been busy in making a fly-leaf to each of my prints, and I send a specimen or two that are ready to know what you think of that plan. Many people can read letter-press who cannot read mezzotinto. I shall send you my discourse. They want me to preach again in the same place."

In February he had a severe attack of rheumatic fever from which, in his doctor's opinion, he never fully recovered. In consequence of this illness he was unable to prepare any large work for this year's Academy. His contributions were—three water-colours, *The Mound of the City of Old Sarum*, *Stoke Pogis Church*, and *An Interior of a Church* ; and one pencil drawing, *A Study of Trees made in the grounds of Charles Holford, Esq., at Hampstead*. All these sketches are now at South Kensington, and perhaps the most noteworthy is *Stoke Pogis Church, the Scene of Gray's Elegy*, of which an illustration is given. Its beauty is best suggested by the simple statement that it is completely in harmony with the spirit of the *Elegy*. It is the representation of a particular church and graveyard ; but it is also something more, and something greater than this.

\* Their former resident tutor.

“ For who to dumb forgetfulness a prey,  
This pleasing anxious being ere resign’d,  
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,  
Nor cast one longing lingering look behind ? ”

In the picture—as in reality—the headstones stand for this instinctive, individual protest against oblivion; but they are treated by the artist in the light of a vision that is wider. Everything in the sketch is mouldering and moss-grown, gently reclaimed for use by earth, the mother and giver of life. She does not seize upon her own; through forms of new beauty and ever-varying gradation she gathers man and his handiwork back to herself. *The Study of Trees at Hampstead* is sufficient proof that the weak and nerveless drawing of trees often noticeable in Constable’s pictures resulted from carelessness rather than incompetence.

In July the artist, with his son John, visited Mr. George Constable at Arundel. Writing to Leslie of his enjoyment, and the beauty of the surrounding country, he says: “ But we have been to Petworth, and I have thought of nothing since but that vast house and its contents. The Earl was there; he asked me to stay all day; nay more, he wished me to pass a few days in the house. I excused myself, saying I should like to



*Water-colour*

STOKIE POGIS CHURCH

*South Kensington*

To face page 102







make such a visit when you were there, which he took very agreeably, saying, 'Be it so, then, if you cannot leave your friends now.'” In pursuance of this plan, Constable in September accepted a second invitation to Petworth, where Leslie and his family were staying as the guests of Lord Egremont. He remained for a fortnight, and, as a carriage was each day at his service, he saw and recorded much of the surrounding scenery. A sketch book filled with drawings made during this visit is now at South Kensington. Leslie in his biography speaks of this time spent together at Petworth, as a valuable opportunity of noting the personal habits of his friend. He speaks of going to Constable's bedroom one morning before breakfast to find he had already been out sketching, and that his dressing-table was strewn with flowers, birds' feathers, and lichen-covered bark. On October 16 the Houses of Parliament were burned. Constable, with his sons John and Charles, witnessed the conflagration from a hackney coach on Westminster Bridge, and Leslie speaks of a vivid pen-and-ink sketch of the spectacle made from memory. He was at work again at this time upon *Salisbury from the Meadows*, and, in December, he sat for the head of Garcia Fernandez, the physician, in Wilkie's picture of Columbus.

To the Royal Academy of 1835 he sent *The Valley*

*Farm*, which was bought before the Exhibition by Mr. Vernon. It was bequeathed by him to the Nation, and is now in the National Gallery. Constable told Leslie that, on first seeing this picture on his easel, Mr. Vernon had asked whether it was being painted for any particular person; and he had replied: "Yes, sir, it is painted for a *very particular* person—the person for whom I have all my life painted." On April 8 he wrote to George Constable: "I have got my picture into a very beautiful state; I have kept my brightness without my spottiness, and I have preserved God Almighty's daylight, which is enjoyed by all mankind, excepting only the lovers of old dirty canvas, perished pictures at a thousand guineas each, cart grease, tar, and snuff of candle." Yet when it was despatched to the Exhibition he speaks of having been obliged to send it in an unfinished state, and he spent much time upon it when it returned to his studio in the autumn. On October 29 he wrote: "I have been very busy with Mr. Vernon's picture. Oiling out, making out, polishing, scraping, &c., seem to have agreed with it exceedingly. The 'sleet' and 'snow' have disappeared, leaving in their places silver, ivory, and a little gold." In writing of the Exhibition, Constable says that the large pictures hung this year are in no way remarkable, but that, under the line, there are some excellent smaller works,



*Oil Painting*

THE VALLEY FARM

*National Gallery*

To face page 104



and adds: "Turner's light, whether it emanates from sun or moon, is exquisite."

His second lecture at Hampstead was delivered on June 3, and early in July he again visited George Constable at Arundel, accompanied this time by his eldest daughter as well as his son John. On July 8 he made the water-colour sketch, *Stormy Effect, Little-hampton*, now in the British Museum, and on the 9th he made a pencil sketch of *Arundel Mill and Castle*—a study for the picture left unfinished at his death, and exhibited at the Academy in 1837. In August his second son Charles started for his first voyage, as a sailor, under the care of a captain of an East Indiaman. It cost £200 to get him afloat, and his father, who always shrank from leave-takings, wrote when the parting was over: "I regret all that I have done, when I consider that it was to bereave me of my delightfully clever boy, who would have shone in my own profession,\* and who is now doomed to be driven about on the ruthless sea."

On September 12 the artist wrote to George Constable: "My pictures have come back from Worcester;†

\* "Charles Constable drew and etched beautifully for so young a practitioner." C. R. Leslie.

† To an exhibition of paintings held at Worcester in June 1834 Constable contributed, *The Lock*. To another exhibition there in 1835 he sent five pictures. *John Constable*. Lord Windsor.



I wish I could get off going there to lecture, especially as C—— has been drivelling a parcel of sad stuff in the Worcester paper in the name of Lorenzo ; God knows, not Lorenzo de Medici ; but it is all about *ideal art*, which in landscape is sheer nonsense as they put it,” and on the 14th “I must go to Worcester, or they will think me shabby and a charlatan.” He delivered three lectures there on October 6, 7, and 8, and at South Kensington there is a pencil sketch, *Worcester as seen from the North*, dated October 12, and another of *A Worcestershire Plough*, made on the 14th.\* Constable and his eldest son spent this Christmas with the artist’s relations in Bergholt, and returned to town at the beginning of January.

In the early months of this year Constable was fully engaged in preparing the four lectures on Landscape Art, which he delivered at the British Institution after the opening of the Academy. For the Exhibition he had begun his picture of *Arundel Mill and Castle*, but afterwards laid it aside in favour of *The Cenotaph*, as he found it impossible to finish both, and “preferred to see Sir Joshua Reynolds’ name and Sir George

\* In the catalogue of drawings by Constable in the British Museum is a *Folkestone*, attributed to October 16, 1835. As there is no evidence or likelihood that Constable visited Folkestone in this year, 5 has probably been misread for 3.



Beaumont's once more in the catalogue, for the last time at the old house." The subject of this picture was the cenotaph erected by Sir George Beaumont to the memory of Reynolds, which has been already mentioned in connection with Constable's visit to Cole Orton. In describing the picture in the catalogue of the Exhibition, Constable quoted the lines inscribed on the cenotaph, which Wordsworth had written at Sir George Beaumont's request—

"Ye lime trees ranged before this hallow'd urn,  
Shoot forth with lively power at Spring's return ;  
And be not slow a stately growth to rear  
Of pillars branching off from year to year,  
Till they had learned to frame a darksome aisle,  
That may recall to mind that awful pile  
Where Reynolds, 'mid our country's noblest dead,  
In the last sanctity of fame is laid.  
There though by right the excelling painter sleep  
Where death and glory a joint Sabbath keep,  
Yet not the loss his spirit would hold dear  
Self-hidden praise and friendship's private tear :  
Hence in my patrimonial grounds have I  
Raised this frail tribute to his memory ;  
From youth a zealous follower of the art  
That he profess'd, attach'd to him in heart ;  
Admiring, loving, and with grief and pride  
Feeling what England lost when Reynolds died."

The monument—a rectangular pillar raised on three stone steps—is surrounded by lofty oaks and beeches. Busts of Michael Angelo and Raphael stand on pedestals to right and left, and in front is a small pool which a stag is in the act of quitting. The time is late autumn,\* and the few leaves left on the trees are brown; a glimpse of sunlit lawn through the branches on the right relieves the gloom. Among the obvious technical difficulties presented by the subject is the fact that two busts, equidistant from the central tomb, had to be included in the composition. This picture, now in the National Gallery, is considered one of Constable's most important works, and it has seemed well to quote Wordsworth's lines—though they are not in themselves impressive—for the light they throw on the nature of the sentiment the artist set himself to reveal. As a tribute to the memory of a painter and a friend the monument expresses a feeling that belongs to an age other than our own. The poet's injunction that the trees shall form—

“a darksome aisle,  
That may recall to mind that awful pile ”

at once betrays the fact that such a memorial has closer kinship with a ceremonious building than with the

\* The pencil sketch was made at the end of November.

freedom of a glade. The idea is artificial, and to be capable of artistic treatment it involved an inversion of values—the presentation of a landscape in which man and not nature is the subject. To this end Constable has abstracted what may be called the superficial-autumnal aspect of the natural world, to form a background for his theme: the fleeting glories of a year are falling round the monument of fame that endures. By recognising its narrow limits the artist has made the best of an almost impossible subject, and composed a picture which possesses a certain quality of impressiveness. But with *Stoke Pogis Churchyard* before us, it is difficult to believe that he felt it really worthy of his art, that he was unconscious that in striving to lend dignity to the undignified he had withdrawn the reverence of his tribute where he would himself have been the first to hold it due. Of the Exhibition in general he writes to George Constable: "It is much liked. Wilkie's pictures are very fine, and Turner has outdone himself; he seems to paint with tinted steam, so evanescent and so airy."

On September 16 he says that his son Charles has returned from his voyage, and is to sail again in the middle of November. John is preparing for Cambridge, but has not yet decided whether to enter the Church or

adopt medicine as a profession. Except for an hour or two, he has not himself been out of town once during this year, but now he feels he must take his sailor boy to visit their relatives in Suffolk. On December 30 he writes: "My dear Leslie,—I am vexed with myself for having so long delayed to write to you, to thank you for your kind invitation to these dear children. This fearful weather intimidates me, but it seems little likely to change; and all my dreads, and all I can say about the danger of such an *excursion into the country*\* at such a time, gives no alarm whatever to the children, and they insist on my coming out of my lurking-place, where I thought I had lain up for the winter, and so I must accompany them to your house on Monday to keep New Year's Day. Now all this I do, and let them do, only on condition that Mrs. Leslie and you dine with me on Wednesday. We have venison from my old friend Lady Dysart and are almost alone. . . . Prithee come, 'life is short; friendship is sweet'; these were the last words of poor Fisher to me in

\* The words are italicised by Constable in pursuance of a joking contention with his friend. In March of the previous year he had written: "I long to see you, but the grievous place in which you are cuts off everything." Leslie's home at the time was 12 Pine Apple Place [Edgware Road, a little beyond Old Kilburn Gate].

his last invitation. My month in the Life School is March. I have concluded on setting the three figures of the *St. Peter Martyr*, for I am determined to sift that picture to the bottom. I have by me a very old print of the subject five years before Titian's picture, done from the one which occupied the same place in the Dominican Church. The picture was by Jacopo del Fiore."

On February 17, 1837, he wrote to George Constable: "I cannot give much account of myself, but we have all been well, and have escaped this sad influenza, which has been the desolation of so many hundreds of all ages. John is the most tender of us all; he works hard, as he wishes so much to get himself fit for Cambridge. I believe he goes in October. . . . For myself, I am at work on a beautiful subject, *Arundel Mill*, for which I am indebted to your friendship. It is, and shall be, my best picture; the size three or four feet; it is safe for the Exhibition, and we have as much as six weeks good. We hold our first general meeting at the new house on Monday, and a very noble house it is.\* I am visitor next month in the Life Academy, which I regret, as it cuts up my time; but I relieve,

\* "Constable never joined in the popular cry against the architect of the National Gallery, for not building a larger house than the ground given for the purpose permitted." Leslie.



by exchange, Turner. My great Salisbury print is done, I shall call it *The Rainbow*. You shall soon receive a proof of it." In March he begs Mr. John Lane to keep his children, who have been ailing, within doors "this grievous weather," adding, "I am out every evening from five to nine at the old Academy, visitor in the Life." On the 30th of that month, a fine cold night, he walked most of the way home with Leslie, after a general meeting of the Academy. Leslie recounts incidents of the walk, trifling in themselves, to which after events were to lend a tragic importance. In Oxford Street Constable heard a child cry, and, following the sound, crossed the road, to find a little beggar girl who had hurt her knee. He succeeded in comforting her with a shilling. This done, the friends proceeded on their way. At the west end of Oxford Street they parted—in laughter. All next day Constable was at work on *Arundel Mill and Castle*. In the evening he went out on an errand in connection with the Artists' Benevolent Fund, returning home about nine o'clock. He then had supper and went to bed. Between ten and eleven, when the servant as usual removed the candle by which he had been reading, he was asleep. Later, when John Constable, who had returned from the theatre, was undressing, he woke



in great pain. His son prepared some simple remedies, but the pain increased, and within an hour he died. He was buried in the south-east corner of the churchyard at Hampstead in the same vault with his wife.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE LUCAS MEZZOTINTS

ALLUSION has already been made to the fact that in the year 1829 Constable began to prepare for the publication of a series of mezzotint engravings from his pictures. He was singularly fortunate in the engraver he was able to associate with him in the enterprise—David Lucas, a young man of twenty-seven, and a pupil of S. W. Reynolds.

The first edition of the *English Landscape* series—a set of twenty-two plates in five numbers—was to have been published in 1830, but did not actually appear till 1833. It consisted of a frontispiece, *Golding Constable's House, East Bergholt*, twenty subjects,\* and a

\* 2 *Spring*, 3 *Autumnal Sunset*, 4 *Noon*, 5 *River Stour, Suffolk*, 6 *Summer Morning*, 7 *Summer Evening*, 8 *A Heath*, 9 *A Dell, Helmingham Park, Suffolk*, 10 *Yarmouth, Norfolk*, 11 *A Sea Beach*, 12 *Mill Stream*, 13 *A Lock on the Stour, Suffolk*, 14 *Old Sarum*, 15 *A Summer-land*, 16 *Stoke-by-Neyland*, 17 *A Mill*, 18 *Weymouth Bay, Dorsetshire*, 19

tailpiece, "*The Vignette*," of *Hampstead Heath*. The following introduction for the series had been written on May 28, 1832\*:

" 'Nullius addictus jurare in verba magistri,  
Quo me cunque rapit tempestas, deferor hospes,'  
HORACE, *Ep.* I.

The present collection of prints of English Landscape, after much pains and considerable expense bestowed upon it, is at length completed, and is offered to the notice of the Public; not without anxiety as to the kind of reception it may meet with. The very favourable opinion, however, passed upon it while in progress, by professional and other intelligent friends, at the same time as it had encouraged its publication, has also served to lessen that anxiety in no small degree. The subjects of all the plates are from real scenes, and the effects of light and shadow are merely transcripts of what happened at the time they were taken. The object in view in their production has been to display the Phenomena of the Chiar'oscuro of Nature, to mark some of its endless beauties and varieties, to point out its vast influence on Landscape, and to show its use and

*Summer Afternoon, after a Shower, 20 The Glebe Farm, 21 Hadleigh Castle, near the Nore.*

\* *Constable. The Makers of British Art.* Lord Windsor.

power as a medium of expression. In Art as in Literature there are two modes by which men aim at distinction: in one the Artist, by careful application to what others have accomplished, imitates their works, or selects and combines their various beauties; in the other he seeks excellence at its primitive source—Nature. The one forms a style upon the study of pictures, and produces either imitative or eclectic art, as it has been termed; the other, by a close observation of Nature, discovers qualities existing in her, which have never been portrayed before, and thus forms a style which is original. The results of the one mode, as they repeat that with which the eye is already familiar, are soon recognised and estimated; the advances of the Artist in a new path must necessarily be slow, for few are able to judge of that which deviates from the usual course or qualified to appreciate original studies. The Author, if he could venture to do so, would willingly entertain a hope that the present little work might contribute in some degree to promote the love and consequent study of the Scenery of our own Country, abounding as it does in Grandeur and every description of Pastoral Beauty, and endeared to us by associations of the most powerful kind.” In January of 1833 the following descriptive prospectus was issued:

ENGLISH LANDSCAPE.

VARIOUS SUBJECTS

OF

LANDSCAPE

PRINCIPALLY INTENDED TO MARK  
THE PHENOMENA OF THE CHIAR'OSCURO  
OF NATURE,

BY

JOHN CONSTABLE, Esq., R.A.

*“ Multa vident Pictores in imminetia et in umbris quæ  
nos non videmus.”—CICERO.*

“The present work consists of a collection of Prints of Rural Landscape, all of them engraved by Mr. David Lucas, from the Pictures of Mr. Constable, most of which have been exhibited at the Royal Academy within the last few years, and being now completed, is most respectfully offered to the notice of the Admirers of Art. The Author rests in the belief that this work may not be found wholly unworthy of attention. It originated in no mercenary views, but merely as a pleasing professional occupation, and was pursued with the hope of imparting pleasure and instruction to others. He had imagined to himself an object in art, and had always pursued it. Much of the Landscape forming the

subject of these Plates going far to embody his ideas (owing, perhaps, to the rich and feeling manner in which they are engraved), he has been tempted to publish them, and offers them as the result of his own experience, founded, as he conceives it to be, in a just observation of natural scenery in its various aspects.

‘Soul-soothing Art ! whom morning, noon-tide, even,  
Do serve with all their fitful pageantry.’

It is the desire of the Author in this publication to increase the interest for, and promote the study of, the Rural Scenery of England, with all its endearing associations, its amenities, and even in its most simple localities; England with her climate of more than vernal freshness, in whose summer skies ‘of thousand liveries dight,’ and rich autumnal clouds, the observer of Nature may daily watch her endless varieties of effect. But, perhaps, it is in its professional character that this work may be most considered, so far as it regards true Art; its aim being to direct attention to the source of one of its most efficient principles, ‘the Chiar’oscuro of Nature,’ to meet the influence of Light and Shadow upon Landscape, not only in its general impression and as a means of rendering a proper emphasis on the parts, but also to show its use and power as a medium of expression, so as to note ‘the day, the hour, the sunshine and the shade.’



In some of these subjects an attempt has been made to arrest the more abrupt and transient appearances of the Chiar'oscuro of Nature ; to show its effect in the most striking manner, to give 'to one brief moment caught from fleeting time,' a lasting and sober existence ; and to render permanent many of these splendid but evanescent Exhibitions which are ever occurring in the endless varieties of Nature in her external changes.

'Still must my partial pencil love to dwell  
On the home prospect of my hermit cell ;  
Still must it trace (the fleeting tints forgive)  
Each fleeting charm that bids the Landscape live.'

The subjects of all the plates are taken from real places, and are meant particularly to characterize the scenery of England ; in their selection a partiality has perhaps been given to those of a particular neighbourhood. Some of them may be more generally interesting, as the scene of many of the marked historical events of our Middle Ages. The Author, if he may venture to do so, entertains a hope that this work, founded on principles so legitimate, will not only find its place in the portfolio of the Artist, and be an acquisition to the Amateur ; but, from the almost universal esteem in which the Arts are now held, he trusts it may prove generally acceptable."

Mr. Wedmore, in his work on the engravings,\* tells us that Leslie quoted only a few of the letters forming the mass of correspondence on the subject that passed between Constable and Lucas, and, in using them, was hampered by consideration for persons who were alive when his narrative was written. But the fact is only an additional testimony to the skill of the biographer; undoubtedly he was discreet, but, with fuller knowledge, we find little that is essential omitted from his chronicle. Mr. Wedmore graphically summarises the characteristics of their correspondence between the years 1829 and 1835—the increasing petulance and indecision, arising from ill-health on the one side, and the combination of dilatoriness and amenity on the other. He tells us of the envelope, addressed in 1832, “To Mr. Lucas, 27 in some street in Chelsea, but the Devil only knows where,” and of a letter written in the same year, “Be assured, dear Lucas, the plate of the *Glebe Farm* is utterly abortive. It is all, *all*, that I have wished to avoid. The book is made by me to avoid all that is to be found there—a total absence of breadth, richness, tone, chiaroscuro, and substituting soot, black fog, smoke, scratchiness, edginess, and an intolerable and restless imitation.” And again in December 1834, “Let me see and hear of these matters as little as possible, for neither my health,

\* *Constable : Lucas*. Frederick Wedmore. (P. & D. Colnaghi.)

nor my time, nor my children's property will bear any further encroachments upon them."

Whatever the dramatic value of touches such as these, historically they are of small moment, and add little to the story as Leslie tells it. His version is introduced with the following letter, written on September 15, 1829. "Dear Lucas,—A total change has again taken place, Leslie dined with me yesterday; we have agreed on a long landscape *Evening*, with a flight of rooks, as a companion to the *Spring* and the *Whitehall Stairs* in place of *The Castle*. Prithce come and see me at six this evening, and take the things away, lest I change again. However, I like all the last affairs if you do. I will tell you the reasons for so changing. Pray come at six. Bring something in your hand, I don't care what." The "long landscape" selected was *Autumnal Sunset*, number three of the series, from a sketch \* made in the fields at East Bergholt with the tower of Stoke Church in the distance towards the right and Langham Hill and church on the left. This is one of the most beautiful of the mezzotints. The deep glow of the sunset is wonderfully given. All the tones are left † dark in relation to the sun itself, and the figures on the right are in deep shadow.

\* Now at South Kensington.

† A mezzotint engraver works from *dark to light*.

Mr. Wedmore suggests that, from ineptitude, the engraver has tamely rendered Constable's birds. This surely is a mistake. In comparing the sketch with the engraving, the conclusion that the latter was largely created by Lucas is inevitable; he has gathered a scattered composition into simple and reposeful lines, and the curve of birds in flight, symmetrical with the landscape contour on the left, is essential to his design. It happens, too, that their long level sweep is truer to the effect of homing birds at sunset; but this, in a sense, is accidental. Lucas merely uses them in producing his general effect of repose and withdrawal. And, unlike Constable, it is in such undistracted rendering of the central sentiment of a subject that he excels. This is the secret of his marvellous success in reproducing sketches, and his comparative failure as an engraver of finished and complicated pictures. The *Spring*, number two in the *English Landscape*, is from a sketch\* of East Bergholt Common. To the right of the picture is a windmill which belonged to Golding Constable and in which the artist worked in his youth. Lord Windsor gives a rough sepia sketch of this mill, and says that David Lucas, for whose guidance it was made by the artist, wrote of it to Mr. Hogarth: "This blot of the windmill has reference to the engraving of *Spring* or

\* Now at South Kensington.

*The Mill on East Bergholt Common.* It was done to explain the altered shapes of the vanes in their different positions, for Mr. Constable pointed out that, as the generality of artists represented them, they would never turn round at all, whereas, if correctly done, a miller could tell not only what they were doing inside, but the direction and force of the wind blowing at that time."

On February 26, 1830, Constable wrote, from Charlotte Street. "Dear Lucas—I am anxious to see you to have further talk about the plates. First, I want to know how forward the *Evening* is and the retouched *Stoke*. I have not the wish to become the possessor of the large plate of *The Castle*, but I am anxious that it should be fine, and will take all pains with it. It cannot fail to be so if I may judge from what I have seen. I have taken much pains with the last proof of *The Summerland*, but I fear I shall be obliged to reject it. It has never recovered its first trip up, and the sky with the new ground is and ever will be rotten. I like your first plates far, very far, the best; but I allow much for your distractions since, with those devils, the printers, and other matters not in unison with that patient toil which ought always to govern the habits of us both. Do not neglect *The Wood*, as I am almost in want of the picture. Bring me another large *Castle*, or



two, or three, for it is mighty fine, though it looks as if all the chimney-sweepers in Christendom had been at work on it, and thrown their soot bags up in the air. Yet everybody likes it; but I should recollect that none but friends see my things; I have no doubt the world despises them. Come early to-morrow evening, and bring what you can, and an account of the next; I am nervous and anxious about them. I have made the upright windwill quite perfect. I should like the book to consist of eight; pray tell the writer not to complete his sketch of the title; I have made another." *The Summer Evening*, number seven of the series, about which the artist inquires, is from a sketch\* of pasture-land beneath a sunset sky at East Bergholt, close to the scene of the *Autumnal Sunset*. The mezzotint is marred by the faulty drawing of a white cow in the centre of the foreground. The crescent moon in the broken sunset sky is distracting, and the whole effect slightly disturbed and wanting in repose. Perhaps because of its kinship in subject with the *Autumnal Sunset*, and the difficulty of differentiating it, Lucas appears to have been uncertain how to treat it, and, though it contains effects which, considered separately, are beautiful—with all due deference to modern critics, Leslie was perhaps not far astray in pronouncing it to be among the least

\* Now at South Kensington.



successful engravings of the *Landscape* series. The expression "retouched *Stoke*" is of considerable interest, as this mezzotint, number sixteen of the series, differs from extant sketches of the subject.\* The completed mezzotint, like the sketch in the National Gallery, represents the imposing church of Stoke-by-Neyland, and a white cottage below it—in light on the left; to the right heavy trees and a woman carrying a sheaf; but, unlike the sketch, the engraving has also a rainbow above the church, birds, and a figure at the stile in the foreground. Mr. Wedmore tells us that the earliest Trial Proofs show only the tower of the church without the nave, and have no rainbow. This is curious, as in the letter-press quoted by Leslie, explaining the sketch, Constable lays stress on the presence of both. He says: "The impressive solemnity of a summer's noon, when attended, as it often is during the heats of the season, by thunder clouds, is attempted to be expressed in this picture; at the same time the appearance of a noon-day rainbow is hinted at, when the arc it describes is at the lowest. . . . The length of the nave, with its continuous line of embattled parapet, and its finely proportioned chancel, may challenge the admiration of the architect." *The Castle* mentioned in this letter is not

\* At South Kensington and the National Gallery.

the *Hadleigh Castle*,\* forming number twenty-one of the series, but an engraving of the same subject—one of the six large † plates from Constable's works, issued by Lucas at his own risk. Both this mezzotint, and that included in the *English Landscape* collection, are taken from the picture exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1829, showing the two round broken towers of the castle on the left, and to the right, in broad expanse, the Estuary of the Thames. The scene is represented on a morning of storm clouds and broken lights, and in the completed mezzotint for the series, a solitary gull has been added in the foreground. *The Summerland*, number fifteen of the series, was not rejected. It is taken from a sketch of the familiar fields at East Bergholt, and was originally lettered *A Summerland*. *Rainy Day*. *Ploughmen*. A man is ploughing in a high field in the foreground. Behind him a dark belt of woodland stretches across the picture, and beyond it is a wide valley. The sky is glorious, but the lines of trees are insufficiently broken with lights, and give the effect of a barrier. *The Wood*, entitled a *Dell in Helmingham Park, Suffolk*, is number nine of the series; it is probably taken from a sketch of a large picture of the subject exhibited at the Academy in 1830. It represents a dell crossed

\* 6 by 9 inches in size.

† 10 $\frac{3}{4}$  by 14 $\frac{3}{8}$  inches in size.

by a wooden footbridge. Behind the bridge the picture is filled by dark foliage and grotesque tree trunks. The foreground is petty and not improved by a curiously solid cow. There is no massing of shadow, the lights are too many and too much divided, giving to the mezzotint a striped, one-plane effect which is very unpleasing.

On March 2, 1830, Constable writes: "Dear Lucas,— Shall I see you on Thursday? Alfred Chalon says, 'The Castle is a fine looking thing.' I am anxious to see a first proof of the *Evening*; but take your time; I will be very good and patient in future. I long to see the Church, now that it is removed to a better spot—two fields off. Take care to avoid rottenness, it is the worst quality of all. Leslie has not the *Stoke*; take him one when you next prove it, with the last alteration." And again: "Dear Lucas,—I send the *Jaques* in a flat, yet feel assured you will not make a *flat* of him. I am much pleased with what we are about so far, only I fear if we do not mind, we shall not have enough of the pastoral. Leslie has just been here, and likes much the sketch in a lane, which I send for you to look at. It is a lovely subject, rich and novel, and what is better than all, *natural*; it would be a glorious full subject." *Jacques and the Wounded Stag* was not included in the *English Landscape* collection, but was one of the

fourteen plates, uniform in size with that series, published by Lucas in 1844. The "sketch in a lane" is probably the small \* engraving never published, which Mr. Wedmore describes as "*A Cottage in a Cornfield* (No. 2). The subject is that of the Lucas publication of this name,† and, more or less, of the large *Cornfield*, and said to have been done only to indicate to Constable what one or other of these would be.

Before the end of the year Lucas was interrupted in his work by the illness of his wife and one of their children. On January 4, 1831, Constable wrote to him: "I am so very anxious to hear how things are going on in your house, that I send my man, who I trust will bring me some better account, though for the poor little fellow I cannot feel sanguine. . . . Don't think of me or my concerns for a moment; your business is with yourself. I mention this only to relieve your mind from all other anxiety, as I well know your great integrity, and that you are always too ready to devote yourself to others, or at least to me." There is not the smallest reason to doubt the sincerity of this expression of affectionate sympathy; but at this time and upon this subject the artist appears to have lost control of his nerves. Eight

\*  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches by  $1\frac{3}{4}$  in size.

†  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches by  $6\frac{1}{4}$  in size.

days later he writes, still with gentleness, but in a more self-centred strain: "Dear Lucas,—My indisposition sadly worries me, and makes me think (perhaps too darkly) on almost every subject. Nevertheless, my seven infants, my time of life and state of health, and other serious matters, make me desirous of lightening my mind as much as possible of unnecessary oppression, as I fear it is already too over-weighted. I have thought much on my book, and all my reflections on the subject go to oppress me; its duration, its expense, its hopelessness of remuneration; added to which I now discover that the printsellers are watching it as their lawful prey, and they alone can help me. I can only dispose of it by giving it away. My plan is to confine the number of plates to those now on hand; I see we have about twenty. The three present numbers contain twelve; others begun are about eight or ten more, some of which may not be resumed, and we must begin the frontispiece. It harasses my days and disturbs my rest at nights. The expense is too enormous for a work that has nothing but your beautiful feeling and execution to recommend it. The painter himself is totally unpopular, and ever will be on this side the grave; the subjects *nothing but the art*, and the buyers wholly ignorant of that. I am harassed by the lengthened prospect of its duration; therefore I go



back to my first plan of twenty, including frontispiece and vignette, and we can now see our way out of the wood. I can bear the irritation of delay (from which I have suffered so much that I attribute my present illness in part to it) no longer; consider, not a fortnight's work has been done towards the whole for the last four months. Years must roll on to produce the twenty-six prints, and all this time I shall not sell a copy. Remember, dear Lucas, I mean not, nor think one reflection on you. Every thing, with the plan, is my own, and I want to relieve my mind of that which harasses it like a disease. Do not for a moment think I blame you, or that I do not sympathise with you in those lamentable causes of hindrance which have afflicted your home. Pray let me see you soon. I am not wholly unable to work, thank God! I hope poor Mrs. Lucas is better." On the 23rd he wrote again: "Let me know when I shall see you. I am very anxious you should call, as I am sadly lonely, and do not get well; but I am very much better. I have formed the wish to add a windmill to the set, leaving the title and vignette distinct, and to be given in, which will look handsome. I have made a drawing of the title for you to see, and I wish you to choose the windmill. . . . I hope Mrs. Lucas is better, and yourself well."

On September 29 he writes: "Dear Lucas,—I fear we



must now engrave the *Waterloo*. The ships are too commonplace and vulgar, and will never unite with the general character of the book. Though I want variety, I don't want hotch-potch. We must not have one uncongenial subject; if we have, it cannot fail to tinge the whole book." No engraving of *The Opening of Waterloo Bridge* was included in the *English Landscape*, but it is among the fourteen plates of the same size issued after Constable's death. So also is the *View on the Orwell*,\* alluded to in this letter as "the ships." At the end of October Constable writes to Lucas: "Keep the new *Old Sarum* clear, bright, and sharp, but don't lose solemnity." He had been dissatisfied with the first engraving of the subject, and had gone to the expense of a second plate. It is taken from a sketch† representing, in the middle distance, the mound of the city of Old Sarum, showing dim and desolate at twilight, and behind, a powerful sky. The subject has provided Lucas with a clear central theme, and he has rendered it admirably. A solemn effect is always easier to him than a gay one, and here, in soft, subdued tones, he has represented the glory of desolation. In the letter-press to accompany the engraving Constable wrote: "This subject, which seems to embody the words of the poet,

\* From the sketch at South Kensington.

† Now at South Kensington.

‘Paint me a desolation,’ is one with which the grander phenomena of nature best accord. Sudden and abrupt appearances of light—thunder-clouds—wild autumnal evenings—solemn and shadowy twilights ‘flinging half an image on the straining sight’—with variously-tinted clouds, dark, cold, and gray, or ruddy and bright—even conflicts of the elements heighten, if possible, the sentiment which belongs to it.” And, speaking of Old Sarum, in a note to a friend, he says: “Who can visit such a spot and not feel the truth and awfulness of the words of St. Paul, ‘Here we have no continuing city!’”

On June 25, 1832, Constable wrote: “Dear Lucas,—I send you the picture with my best hopes and wishes, and which, I assure you, are not slight or disinterested, but I am more anxious for your sake than my own; anxious that your enthusiasm may not be thrown away or prove unpropitious.” The picture was *The Cornfield*,\* which Lucas had decided to engrave at his own risk, and which was ultimately purchased and published with *The Lock*,† by Moon, in June 1834. In October he is jocular over his misfortunes: “Dear Lucas,—I have added a *Ruin* to the little *Glebe Farm*, for not to have

\* Now in the National Gallery.

† These engravings of *The Cornfield* and *The Lock* are 22½ by 19½ inches in size.

a symbol in the book of myself, and of the work which I have projected, would be missing the opportunity.” This *Ruin*, according to Leslie, was a plate afterwards rejected by Constable.\* It was worked up into *Castle Acre Priory*, one of the most unsatisfactory of the series of fourteen mezzotints published by Lucas after the death of Constable.

On November 14, the morning after his return from John Dunthorne’s funeral, Constable writes to Lucas: “In the coach, yesterday, coming from Suffolk, were two gentlemen and myself, all strangers to each other. In passing the Vale of Dedham, one of them remarked, on my saying it was beautiful, ‘Yes, sir, this is Constable’s country.’ I then told him who I was, lest he should spoil it.” And Leslie, in commenting on the letter, says that the engraving, *Summer Morning*, number six in the series, gives the view of Dedham Vale seen from the high road. This plate was taken from the *Dedham Vale* † of 1815, which has been considered at length in an earlier chapter, but in the mezzotint the cow and the man with the scythe have given place to two cows, a milkmaid and a milking-pail! The engraving is beautiful, but the alteration in the figures is not an

\* A proof of the plate in its original condition is in the Print Room at the British Museum.

† Now at South Kensington. Illustration page.

improvement. The sentimental and benedictory milk-maid goes far towards reconciling us to her sturdy fore-runner. Constable originally intended that a description should accompany each engraving in the *English Landscape*, but only the letter-press for the first six mezzotints was written, and the thought of publishing it was abandoned. It is difficult, looking at the engravings, to feel that the manuscript elucidates them or that they stand in need of elucidation, but psychologically the essays are of interest. Writing of the *Summer Morning* Constable says : " Nature is never seen, in this climate at least, to greater perfection than about nine o'clock in the morning of July and August, when the Sun has gained sufficient strength to give splendour to the landscape, 'still gemmed with the morning dew,' without its oppressive heat; and it is still more delightful if vegetation has been refreshed with a shower during the night. It may be well to mention the different appearances which characterise the Morning and Evening effects. The dews and moisture which the earth has imbibed during the night cause a greater depth and coolness in the shadows of the Morning; also from the same cause, the lights are at that time more silvery and sparkling; the lights and showers of Evening are of a more saffron or ruddy hue, vegetation being parched during the day from the drought and heat."

A letter, addressed to Mr. George Constable, of Arundel, on December 14 of this year, 1832, informs him that copies of the engravings are being forwarded for his choice—sealed proofs which have been inspected by the artist, and open-letter impressions on India paper. Prints also are sent, and the interesting comment is added: “Equally good, for all are printed by ourselves.”\* The artist was charging for open-letter impressions on India paper two guineas the Part; for open-letter impressions on French paper a guinea and a half; for later impressions, with slightly varied letter, a guinea.† There were five Parts, containing four engravings in each, with the Frontispiece and Vignette added to the First and Fifth respectively. In view of these prices and the few buyers forthcoming, it is not surprising to find the note of complaint introduced even to one who, as yet, is a comparative stranger. The letter ends: “I should feel happy in the belief that my book should ever remunerate itself, for I am gratifying my vanity at the expense of my children, and I could have wished that they might have lived on me, not the reverse. My only consolation is, that my fortune has not sheltered me in idleness, as my large

\* “Mr. Lucas had fitted up a press in his own house.” Leslie.

† *Constable: Lucas.* F. Wedmore.



canvases, the dreams of a happy but unpropitious life, will prove. Pray forgive the unreserved tone of this hasty scrawl.—I remain, my dear sir, always your obliged servant, JOHN CONSTABLE.”

The next mention of the mezzotints in Leslie's chronicle is of a Proof impression of *Weymouth Bay*, which Mrs. Leslie had seen and coveted at Charlotte Street. Constable next day forwarded it to her, and the note with which his present was accompanied, containing a reference to Wordsworth's poem, *Peele Castle in a Storm*, has already been quoted. *Weymouth Bay*, number eighteen of the *English Landscape* series, is taken from the sketch of the same name,\* representing a wide curving beach with rocks in the foreground. Over the sea and to the left of the engraving the sky is black darkness; far to the right are rifted clouds and bars of light. Above the sea wheel gulls, showing pure white against the blackness overhead. Tempest is at hand, and except in the sea, which in the painting is placid and inept, the forces gathering to battle are powerfully rendered. In all other respects the reproduction is grand and tragic, and Lucas has done his best to magnify the effect of the wavelets along the shore by working their edges into long continuous curves of highest light.

\* Now at South Kensington.



The next three letters are in humorous vein. In the first Constable writes: "Dear Lucas,—Poor infatuated printer ——\* has done nothing for me for three weeks: not a single India copy nor one plain one can I get. But he has sent me a large piece of wedding-cake, and this, too, just as he has been begging assistance to buy bread and butter! The devil undoubtedly finds much fun in this town, or we should never hear of such acts of exceeding folly." The next refers to one of the large engravings, *The Lock* and *The Cornfield*, which Lucas himself was venturing at this time, and which were published by Moon in the following year, 1834: "Dear Lucas,—All who have seen your large print like it exceedingly; it will be, with all its grandeur, full of detail. Avoid the soot-bag, and you are safe; Rembrandt had no soot-bag, you may rely on it. Be careful how you etch it, that you do not hurt the detail; but there is time enough. I hope you will not injure your family by so large a print." The third runs thus: "Dear Lucas,—I should think the *Yarmouth* would make far the best companion to *Old Sarum*. At the same time *Old Billy Lott's House*, if it could be regrounded at the sides, is a lovely subject. *The Lord Mayor's Show*, I do believe, is too good a joke to be received into *our* church! Nothing can make it either

\* The printer of the letter-press to the English Landscape. Leslie.

Apostolic or canonical, so uncongenial is any part of this hideous Gomorrah.—J.C. And yet, after all, the *Waterloo* is a famous composition, and ought to give much pleasure; but it is the devil, and I am sore perplexed.” *Yarmouth*, number ten of the *English Landscape* series, is taken from the painting of *Yarmouth Jetty*.<sup>\*</sup> On the sea are fishing-boats with spread sails, and, behind them, a man-of-war. A strong breeze is blowing, filling the sails beneath a lovely sky. The sea is freshening and vigorous, and probably touches the limit of the artist’s power in this direction; certainly it surpasses *Harwich*, *Weymouth Bay*, or *On the Orwell* in its movement. *Willy Lott’s House*, though it is clear from the letter just quoted that it was intended for the *Landscape* series, is included in the set of fourteen mezzotints published by Lucas in 1844. Certainly it is worthy of the *English Landscape* collection. The simple subject,<sup>†</sup> in the engraver’s hands, has deepened to impressiveness. The Lord Mayor’s Show, better known as *The Opening of Waterloo Bridge*, also did not make its appearance until the Lucas publications. The parallel lines, which are evident in the foreground of the painting,

\* In Sir Charles Tennant’s collection.

† Except for the horse and horseman, that of the sketch at South Kensington.





DEDHAM VALE

*(From the Mezzotint by David Lucas)*

To face page 139

become unpleasantly marked in the reproduction, and the general lack of unity in the whole composition is accentuated.

In 1835 Constable wrote, in sending John Dunthorne's father a present of copies of the large engravings of *The Lock* and *The Cornfield*: "My dear friend,—I hope you will receive the prints safe. Mr. Lucas bids me tell you that he will send two more which he is now about, *Salisbury* and *Stratford Mill*." These were two other of the six large Lucas engravings, *The Rainbow*, *Salisbury* \* representing the same subject as the earlier *Salisbury*,† and the *River Stour*, *Suffolk*, afterwards called *The Young Waltonians*.‡ The originals from which these plates are taken have already been described at length. Of the *Rainbow* it is sufficient to state that in every respect it is a worthy translation of the masterly painting of *Salisbury from the Meadows*. In June of the same year Constable wrote of it to Lucas: "I should be glad if you would leave the plate here a day or two. Leslie is so much impressed with the proof that he would give any money to possess one; so am I, and would give anything to possess two at least. Now would you mind printing a few, five or six? Would

\*  $21\frac{3}{4}$  inches by 27 in size.

†  $5\frac{1}{2}$  inches by  $8\frac{3}{8}$  in size.

‡  $11\frac{3}{4}$  inches by  $16\frac{1}{2}$  in size.



it hurt the plate? I know you don't like to do so, but I would gladly pay all expenses. It never can nor will be grander than it is now; it is awfully so. You shall be amply paid for this indulgence." Seven months later, February 15, 1836, we find him writing: "My dear Lucas,—The *Salisbury* is much admired in its present state, but still it is too heavy, especially when seen between *The Lock* and *The Drinking Boy*,\* yet we must not break it up, and we must bear in recollection that the sentiment of the picture is that of solemnity, not gaiety; nothing garish, but the contrary; yet it must be bright, clear, alive, fresh, and all the front seen." On December 31, in writing to thank Lucas for some proofs of the *Salisbury*, Constable says: "God preserve your excellent wife, and give her a happy hour; I have not forgotten my own anxieties at such times, though they are never to return. I beg to thank you again and again for the most lovely winter-piece I ever saw.† You have caused the last of the old year to slip away from me with pleasurable feelings; we have now only a quarter of an hour left of the year 1836! Farewell." By January 19, 1837, he is finding

\* *The Cornfield*.

† An impression of *The Salisbury* taken when the plate was imperfectly filled with ink, and which had accidentally the appearance of winter. Mr. Lucas had sent it to Mr. Constable as a curiosity. Leslie.



it difficult to curb his impatience. "Dear Lucas," he writes,—“We must keep this proof as a criterion, and get as much of it as we can. The bow is a grand whole, provided it is clear and tender. How I wish I could scratch and tear away with your tools on the steel, just as old —— wanted to fly up to Langham Hill and tear the trees and hedges all up by the roots ; but I can't do it, and your quiet way is, I well know, the best and only way.” But on the 17th of the following month he is able to report to Mr. George Constable: “My great Salisbury print is done ; I shall call it *The Rainbow* ; you shall soon receive a proof of it.” His pleasure at this point is for once almost unalloyed. He writes : “Dear Lucas,—Mr. Cook the Academician said yesterday that the ‘Salisbury was a grand-looking thing.’ . . . The print is a noble and beautiful thing ; entirely improved and entirely made perfect ; the bow is noble, and is now a neck or nothing business ; it is startling and unique. I have mentioned to your clever and agreeable ruffian, who is in high good humour, two things: the light on the tower under the trees must be made thus” (here a sketch) “instead of thus” (another sketch); “also the little spot on the cloud your ruffian will show you, and he pointed out a good way of doing it ; half an hour will alter both. Thank you for the pains you have taken with the bow ; it is lovely. I hope you are

better." And again: "Your man has told me that there is every reason to know that the *Salisbury* will print both full and rich. Tone, tone, is the most seductive and inviting quality a picture or print can possess; it is the first thing seen, and like a flower invites to our examination of the plant itself." A note to Lucas on March 29 speaks of a slight alteration in the elder bush on the left of the picture, and reiterates his pleasure and satisfaction in the work. And this is probably the last letter Constable ever wrote, as on the following day, March 30, he died.

In this correspondence, as given by Leslie, the facts of the personal relation between artist and engraver become abundantly clear. Extending over a period of nearly ten years, Constable's letters to Lucas are at times querulous and complaining; but on the whole they testify to increasing intimacy and affection. The dullest reader of Leslie's biography of his friend might surmise that, among the letters, on the subject of the mezzotints, which are omitted, would be some representing moods of petulance and reaction. It could hardly indeed have been otherwise; Constable was ill, Lucas dilatory and unmethodical, and the enterprise was from the outset a financial failure.

The larger and more important question of the artistic relation of their work is less easily determined.

The word genius has been freely used of late in connection with David Lucas. I should have inclined to agree with the verdict that it is impossible to over-rate his contribution to perhaps the most beautiful series of mezzotint engravings as yet produced, had I not in the print-room of the British Museum been confronted with a large folio of Lucas's engravings after artists other than Constable. These did not compel respect, much less admiration. In many cases the subjects were hopeless, but the engraver's work was common and ineffective too. Moreover, though in the reproductions of Constable's sketches Lucas was supremely successful, outside those works, even in connection with Constable, he has produced—with the exception of *The Rainbow*—little that is worthy of note. A study of the larger Constable engravings, in connection with those of the *English Landscape*, has led me to the conclusion that—though he was intensely sympathetic and susceptible—his gifts lay within a narrow range. It is, of course, arguable that Constable himself, by over-elaboration and distribution of emphasis minimised the artistic quality of his completed pictures, and, in proportion as their detail is faithfully reproduced, their lack of concentration must be evident; but it is more probable that the engraver's insight was of the not unusual kind that readily apprehends general and “poetic” beauty,

but is insufficiently disciplined and strenuous to penetrate elaborate and finished forms. We have not sufficient information to be really in a position to estimate Lucas's intelligence, but his work suggests the performance of a sensitive and artistic girl on the violin, rather than the subtler and more delicate gradations of the master musician who regards constraint as not the least fertile of the resources he commands. Given a subject of a certain clear emotional aspect and appeal, the heart of it is rendered and the general meaning is expressed, but the translator is at a loss when complexity is to be represented. We have already suggested that in Lucas's hands the *Autumnal Sunset* and the *Summer Evening* were too nearly akin in subject to be successfully differentiated. The sentiment of the sketches is not identical, but the difference is subtle, and just because Lucas in deepening the effect of the *Autumnal Sunset* had broadened it also, the difference became more difficult to render. It is impossible to decide how far the alterations and instructions of the artist were responsible for the marring of the plates, but the succession of proofs in many cases, and most notably the *Vignette* of Hampstead Heath, suggest that the engraver obtained impressive, vague, and general effects which he was unable to sustain when the details were introduced.





A BOAT PASSING A LOCK  
(From the Mezzotint by S. W. Reynolds)

To face page 145



Finally it is necessary to ask whether Constable's painting could with more or less than ordinary facility be compressed to the narrower limits of the engraver's art? In 1824 S. W. Reynolds, by whom Lucas was trained, at his own expense undertook to engrave *The Lock*. Reynolds did not live to complete the plate and it was finished by another hand, but an early proof in the British Museum reveals the greatness of his treatment, and even the finished work surpasses the larger Lucas engraving of the subject made in 1834. When Constable wrote to Fisher to tell him that Reynolds had undertaken *The Lock*, the Archdeacon replied: "I am pleased to find they are engraving your pictures, because it will tend to spread your fame; but I am almost timid about the result! There is in your pictures too much evanescent effect, and general tone, to be expressed by black and white. Your charm is colour, and the cool tint of English daylight. The burr of mezzotint would never touch that." Fisher, by virtue of his sympathy and knowledge, was better qualified than any other of the artist's contemporaries to distinguish the special features of Constable's painting, but in this instance he does not appear to have made sufficient allowance for the principle at the root of his friend's work. Recognition of the *Chiar'oscuro of Nature*—a term on which Constable persistently

harped—necessarily imposed on him as a painter a definite and conscious arrangement of light and shade. This, especially in later life, is at times partially obscured by dabs of colour, and spots and splashes of brightness; but the scheme always exists in solid monochrome foundation, underlying the whole. Chiaroscuro, and not colour, was the primary vehicle of his sentiment.

Yet within the limits already suggested—the reproduction of sketches of broad effects, and the spirited rendering of obvious contrasts—Lucas cannot be overpraised. No one who has carefully considered the engraving of *A Mill near Brighton*, hung below the sketch of the subject at South Kensington, or the mezzotint of *Salisbury from the Meadows* can deny that in Lucas Constable found a translator whose reproductions sometimes, and in some respects, surpassed the originals he rendered. The engraving of *The Mill*, with its splendour of concentrated light, is a nobler, stronger thing than the sketch from which it is taken; and the painting of *Salisbury*—glorious as it is—has not anything quite so pure and free as the springing towers of the reproduction. Constable's cathedral symbolised aspiration, spoke of a faith that soared; Lucas's earthborn towers are already united with the sunlit heaven.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONSTABLE'S LECTURES

THE impossibility of deducing a man's actions from a knowledge of his theory is patent enough, and of the correlative difficulty in inferring the ideals of an artist from his works, the antagonisms of the critics offer a sufficient guarantee. Except to the student of rare judgment and insight, the approximate truth about a man's work can seldom be apparent except through knowledge, as well of his words as of his deeds. Fortunately, in Constable's case, the notes of seven lectures delivered by him on his art are extant. Their intrinsic interest has of necessity been somewhat diminished by time, but their value remains great for the light that they throw upon the artist's aims and achievement.

In lecturing, Constable relied little on memoranda. He depended chiefly on charts of names and of dates, and on reproductions of pictures. In consequence, notes

taken by Leslie and embodied in his *Life* are the only existing memorials of most of the lectures. Of one, however, the first—delivered at Hampstead in 1833—an abstract was found, after his death, among the artist's possessions ; and although the manuscript is inserted in full in Leslie's biography it merits a detailed consideration. The object of the lecture was to trace in outline the history of landscape, "pointing out the *epochs* which mark its development, progress, and perfection—to separate it from the mass of historical art in which it originated—to trace it to its source, and show how by degrees it assumed form until at last it became a distinct and separate class of painting." Only a passing reference to the classical epoch is made, the paintings at Herculaneum and the Baths of Diocletian being described as "arabesques," in which the landscape portions, like the rest, are wholly devoid of chiaroscuro, though both this and colour had been understood and practised by the artists of the Golden Age. The rise of landscape art in the Middle Ages is described more fully : how the purely symbolical treatment in manuscripts and missals was superseded, in the grander historical painting, by the attempt to introduce appropriate detail and to convey, in a landscape background, the sentiment proper to the central theme. Cimabue and Giotto are instanced as exemplifying this development,

as well as the simplicity and earnestness of primitive art. Ghirlandaio, Bernardo, and Paolo Uccello are then named as links in the chain connecting Giotto with Raphael, by whom landscape is "most beautifully and appropriately introduced . . . The soothing solitudes of his middle distances finding a corresponding serenity in the features of the benign and lovely subjects of his works." After pointing to the mean and trivial conception characteristic of the Dutch and German schools, Constable turns to Venice, "where the true art of imitation was first understood," and connects the powerful and developed use of landscape there, and its subsequent influence upon European art, with the respect for nature prominent in the chief masters of the school. An extensive treatment of the school of Bologna follows, described as "founded mainly, but not wholly, on the Venetian": The Caracci, with their "lofty energy," and Domenichino, with his "sentiment and romantic grandeur" supply examples of its methods, and we are led to recognise that landscape has in their hands become for the first time a separate branch of art. High praise is next accorded to Niccolo Poussin, in whose hands "each class of landscape vies with the rest for preference"; and it is shown how the peculiar style of Paul Bril, working through his pupil Tassi, "engrafted a certain portion of Flemish art on that of

Italy," and produced that "more perfect and beautiful transcript of nature which was achieved by the inimitable Claude." Salvator Rosa and Sebastian Bourdon are briefly appreciated, and Rubens and Rembrandt finally alluded to as representative of the noblest qualities of Dutch and Flemish art. The death of these great men introduced, says Constable, a period of feeble, mannered imitation, "from which degraded and fallen state it is delightful to say that landscape-painting revived in our own country in all its purity, simplicity, and grandeur in the works of Wilson, Gainsborough, Cozens, and Girtin."

Constable's characterisation of painters and his choice of language in describing what he finds in their works are invaluable aids to our imaginative reconstruction of his character; and a knowledge of the articles of his professional creed is—apart from any question of their validity—the best index to the meaning and aim of his work. The abstract of this lecture makes it abundantly clear that, at a time when it was common among educated people in England to know little and care less about primitive art, Constable possessed a considerable knowledge of the works of the early Italian painters. He had never had an opportunity of visiting Italy; in 1823 he had written to Fisher: "Oh dear, oh dear, I shall never let my



longing eyes see that famous country !' These are the words of old Richardson, and like him I am doomed never to see the living scenes that inspired the landscape of Wilson and Claude"; but his mentions of Cimabue and Giotto, Jacopo del Fiore and Uccello, prove that he revered and recognised their genius at a time when the existence of their works was almost unknown in England. In this lecture he speaks of Giotto's use of landscape as impressive, and says he has heard of frescoes by him at Pisa, "which wonderfully exhibit its use and power." He rejoices that landscape art was nurtured in infancy by artists such as Cimabue and Giotto, who were "masters of pathos," and his account of its inception is broad and succinct. "The illuminated missals," he says, "when they represent the agony of Christ, indicate the garden only by a flower, or a flower-pot, the rest of the picture being dark. But when historical painting was attempted on a larger scale, and the Passion, the Crucifixion, and the Entombment of our Saviour afforded its most important subjects, landscape, and even some of its phenomena, became indispensable. The cross must be fixed in the ground—there must be a sky—the shades of night must envelop the garden (the scene of the agony), and a more awful darkness the Crucifixion; while rocks and trees made a part of the accompaniments of the sepulchre. Here,

then, however rude and imperfect, we are to look for the origin of landscape. It was first used as an assistant in conveying sentiment, and being found completely successful, was cultivated by succeeding painters, until at length it became a distinct branch of art. Pictures are books ; and they were especially so considered in the earliest ages of painting in Europe, when so few even of the highest classes could either read or write. The great importance of painting, therefore, as a means of instruction, will account for the whole history of our Saviour being painted on one panel. The artists very justly considered themselves engaged in works of piety, and they employed all their powers to tell their stories with the greatest perspicuity. In the first simple ages of painting there was no display of the technicalities of art ; they were indeed unknown. The holy truths of Christianity were told with sincerity in pictures filled with natural expression and purity of sentiment. The works of Cimabue, Giotto, &c., were carried in procession to the churches, there to remain, to enlighten the ignorant and to add to the fervours of the devout."

Constable's allusions to the puerilities of Dutch and German artists show that his habit of realistic representation was not grounded in the confusion of idea that supposes the reality of an object to be a quality endowing it with artistic worth. Rejoicing that the

development of landscape art did not in the Middle Ages fall into Dutch and German hands, he says: "With them dignity of subject never excluded meanness, and the wretched material introduced into their historical pictures could have led to nothing, or worse than nothing, impressive. The accompaniments, even of the Nativity, were often, with them, an assemblage of the mean and ridiculous. An owl, seen through a hole in a thatched roof, sitting on a beam just over the head of the Virgin, with a mouse dangling by its tail from its claw; and pigs quarrelling at the trough." This condemnation of literalism is of the greater value and interest from the fact that it is immediately followed by an onslaught on romanticism, worded in a way that, apart from the context, might expose Constable to the charge of belittling imagination, which has at times been brought against him. "It was," he says, "at Venice, the *heart* of colour, and where the true art of imitation was first understood, that landscape assumed a rank and decision of character that spread future excellence through all the schools of Europe. Giorgione and Titian, both historical painters, were early disciplined in the schools of the brothers Bellini, where they were taught to imitate nature in what has been termed a servile manner. But it appears to have been the true way of proceeding if we may judge from the

result ; for afterwards, when those great painters had attained the plenitude of their powers, they never lost their respect for nature, nor for a moment wandered from the materials which were about them, and which they had been taught to copy so admirably, into the vacant fields of idealism." *The vacant fields of idealism* was a serviceable phrase enough to embody Constable's controversy with the art of his day—the day of Maturin and Byron, with its demand for the prodigious and astounding—and doubtless "idealism," like "inspiration," had to the ears of his opponents a special and restricted meaning. The value of a word or an expression is necessarily relative, depending on the capacity of those who use it ; and in Constable's time it was the tendency to regard the higher activities of mind and spirit as substitutes for a true method and practice rather than as its reward, to consider them not as the crown of knowledge, but as some lucky lodestone rendering knowledge unnecessary. This was, in fact, the outcome of a vapid sentimentalism, and Constable was constantly protesting against it. The word "inspiration" became like a red rag to him, so frequently did he hear it falling from the lips of shallow enthusiasts. "They inspire," remarks a critic, harmlessly enough, upon a collection of Raphael's drawings. "They do more, sir—they inform," says the relentless

Constable; and in the Introduction we saw how Blake himself, who had earned the right to talk of inspiration, did not talk of it, in Constable's presence, unproved.

But the chief interest of the lecture is in its description of particular paintings, such as *The Martyrdom of the Dominican Peter*, Domenichino's *St. Jerome*, and Guido's *Aurora*, which are admirable in directness of treatment and vivid simplicity of expression. The first is "a scene on the skirts of a forest, and the time verging towards the close of day, as we may judge from the level and placid movements of the clouds on the deep blue sky, seen under the pendent foliage of the trees which overhang the road. The choice of a low horizon greatly aids the grandeur of the composition; and magnificent as the larger objects and masses of the picture are, the minute plants in the foreground are finished with an exquisite, but not obtrusive, touch, and even a bird's nest with its callow brood may be discovered among the branches of one of the trees. Amid this scene of amenity and repose, we are startled by the rush of an assassin on the helpless travellers, monks, one of whom is struck down and the other wounded and flying in the utmost terror. At the top of the picture, through the loftiest branches of the trees, a bright and supernatural light strikes down on the dying man, who sees in the glory a vision of angels



bearing the emblems of martyrdom, and, illuminating in its descent the stems and foliage, contrasts with the shadowy gloom of the wood. The elder bush, with its pale funereal flowers, introduced over the head of the saint, and the village spire in the distance, the object of his journey, increase the interest and add to the richness of the composition. Admirable also is the contrivance of the tight-drawn drapery, part of the garment of the martyr, which, pressed by the foot of the assassin, pins his victim to the earth." "The subject of the *St. Jerome* is an aged and decrepit man, dying, attended by the ministers of religion. Through columns and a lofty arch are seen some religious buildings, perhaps often the scene of the dying saint's good works, on a gentle eminence, and overshadowed by a single group of trees. The placid aspect of this simple landscape seems like a requiem to soothe the departing spirit: its effect is like that of solemn music heard from an adjoining apartment. On a serene blue sky hovering cherubs fill and complete the composition." "The *Aurora* is the finest instance I know of the beauty of natural landscape brought to aid a mythological story, and to be sensible of its value we have only to imagine a plain background in its stead. Though Guido has placed us in the heavens, we are looking towards the earth, where seas and mountain tops are receiving the first beams of



the morning sun. The chariot of Apollo is borne on the clouds, attended by the Hours and preceded by Aurora, who scatters flowers; and the landscape, instead of diminishing the illusion, is the chief means of producing it, and is indeed most essential to the story."

Constable's survey of the history of landscape art, and therefore, strictly speaking, his lecture, closed with a eulogy of Wilson and Gainsborough, Cozens and Girtin; but his address actually ended with a characteristic criticism of modern connoisseurship which contains one of his most notable phrases. "I shall," he says, "conclude with a brief allusion to a certain set of painters, who, having substituted falsehood for truth, and formed a style mean and mechanical, are termed mannerists. Much of the confusion of opinions in art arising from false taste is caused by works of this stamp, for *if the mannerists had never existed, paintings would always have been easily understood*. The education of the professed connoisseur being chiefly formed in the picture gallery and the auction room, seldom enables him to perceive the vast difference between a mannerist and the genuine painter. To do this requires long and close study, and a constant comparison of the art with nature. So few among the buyers and sellers of pictures possess any knowledge so derived, that the

works of the mannerists often bear as large a price in the market as those of the genuine painters. The difference is not understood by picture-dealers, and thus, in a mercantile way, has a kind of art been propagated and supported from age to age, deserving only to be classed with the showy and expensive articles of drawing-room furniture. To this species of painting belong the works that have marked the decay of styles and filled the intervals between the appearances of the great artists. They are the productions of men who have lost sight of nature, and strayed into the vacant fields of idealism; sometimes, indeed, with talent, and even with power, as in Wouvermans, Berghem, Both, Vernet, Zuccherelli, and Louthembourg; but oftener with feebleness and imbecility, as in Hackert and Jacob Moore."

On the 6th, 7th, and 8th of October, 1835, Constable delivered three lectures in Worcester. Lord Windsor gives the report of the first and second, which appeared in the local newspaper on October 31,\* with the qualification that Constable wrote in regard to it to Leader Williams: "I lately saw the editor of the *Worcester Guardian*: he is a very pleasant person, but I told him how sadly he had mangled and mixed up and contradicted all I had to say about painting; in fact, the

\* *John Constable, R.A. The Makers of British Art.*

first and second lectures were jumbled together (luckily for me he did not hear the third); but as it was all well meant, and not inelegantly done, I expressed myself pleased with it." In order to profess even so much satisfaction the lecturer must have sailed rather near the wind, for he had been reported as saying: "Soon after Andrea Veneziano followed the two extraordinary brothers Van Eyck, who, with several others of the school which they formed, combined to furnish the paintings which adorn the Campo Santo," and credited with asserting that the school of Albert Dürer "at length produced" 'Titian, the master of Venetian painting! In one respect, however, the report possesses some slight positive value. It has been noted already, in the account of Constable's life, that he accepted the invitation to Worcester partly, at least, in the hope of saying something to counteract "the drivelling parcel of sad stuff on ideal art" which had been contributed to the local paper in the name of Lorenzo. He seems to have effected his purpose by, first, admitting that no work of art could be merely a transcript or imitation of natural objects, and then reverting to a dissertation on his favourite text—the laborious and minute study indispensable to the artist. He instanced Sir Joshua Reynolds as depending upon models for every detail of his pictures; and reiterated the statement that no

painter had, or could ever, produce a painting worthy of serious attention on inspiration alone.

The course of four lectures, delivered at the Royal Institution in Albemarle Street on Thursday, May 26, 1836, and the three following Thursdays, is in the main an expansion of the one given at Hampstead in 1833. In the first Constable dealt chiefly with Titian's *Peter Martyr*, which he describes more fully and even more vividly than before, with the object of showing, by means of numerous sketches and drawings attributed to Titian, how slowly and surely the conception was developed and the composition exalted, from a roadside murder to the martyrdom of a saint. He asks his hearers to observe "with what consummate skill the painter, like a great musician, has varied his touch and execution from slow movements to those of extreme rapidity. Thus the quick and vivid sparks of light near and upon the assassin's arm, hand and sword, give inconceivable energy to his action, and contrast finely with the solemn quiet of the retiring forest." Two days after the delivery of this lecture, on May 28, Constable wrote to Mr. Purton: "I hope to murder Both and Berghem on Thursday next at a quarter to four o'clock. The rest that come after are not worth murdering." Yet when the day came, and, after a eulogy of Claude Lorraine, and an appreciative mention

of Sebastian Bourdon and Salvator Rosa, the deed was done, Vernet, Hackert, Jacob Moore, Wootton, Goltzius, Spranger, Lucatelli, Zuccherelli, Mengs, Cipriani, and Angelica Kauffinan, were also felled at a blow, and for Boucher a worse fate was reserved. He was thus slowly and torturingly dismissed: "His scenery is a bewildered dream of the picturesque. From cottages adorned with festoons of ivy and sparrow pots, are seen issuing opera dancers with mops, brooms, milk-pails, and guitars; children with cocked hats, queues, big-wigs, and swords; and cats, poultry, and pigs. The scenery is diversified with winding streams, broken bridges, and water wheels; hedge stakes, dancing minuets, and groves bowing and curtsying to each other; the whole leaving the mind in a state of bewilderment and confusion, from which laughter alone can relieve it. Boucher told Sir Joshua Reynolds that 'he never painted from life, for nature put him out.'" Speaking, in the third lecture, of *The Rainbow* by Rubens and *The Mill* by Rembrandt, he states the case against modern impressionism, and gives the artists of Holland and Flanders their due. He refers to Rembrandt's great picture as being made wholly by chiaroscuro, and remarks: "Succeeding painters have sometimes, in their admiration of *The Mill*, forgotten that Rembrandt chose the twilight to second his



wishes, and have fancied that to obtain equal breadth they must leave out the details of Nature in broad daylight." He showed copies of several paintings by Ruysdael, praising the keenness and exactitude of his rendering, and adding the characteristic remark : " We see nothing truly till we understand it." The leading feature, he said, of the work of the great painters of Flanders and Holland is an unaffected truth and simplicity of expression, and persons, rapturous in speaking of the schools of Italy, but unappreciative of Dutch and Flemish art, were, he believed, to be regarded with suspicion, " a true taste being never a half taste." After passing briefly in review the most notable imitators of Claude and of Poussin, the fourth lecture was devoted to appreciation of the English artists who redeemed landscape-painting from the degradation into which it had fallen in the hands of the mannerists.

On July 25, 1836—in the last year of his life—Constable lectured to the Literary and Scientific Institute at Hampstead on Landscape Art, in more general terms. Leslie's notes of this lecture—incomplete as they undoubtedly are—contain actual quotations amply sufficing to dismiss the erroneous impression that Constable was arrogant or intractable, to which his habit of outspoken criticism had given rise. It must be evident to all who have studied his writings that his tirades were



directed against bombast, and that he was almost over-ready to defer and revere where deference and reverence were due. But, in the main, he was out of sympathy with his contemporaries, and in exposing the vulgarity and emptiness of their ideals, he did not pause to make choice of his words. It is therefore inevitable that the sayings by which he is known should largely be controversial and even antagonistic; but it is for this reason all the more fortunate that records of a lecture, so positive and constructive in nature, remain. At the outset Constable contrasted the judgments of the novice, based on obvious and superficial appearances, with the careful and painstaking estimate of the student, and said: "The young painter who, regardless of present popularity, would leave a name behind him, must become the patient pupil of nature. If we refer to the lives of all who have distinguished themselves in art or science, we should find they have always been laborious. The landscape-painter must walk in the fields with a humble mind. No arrogant man was ever permitted to see nature in all her beauty. If I may be allowed to use a very solemn quotation, I would say most emphatically to the student, 'Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.' . . . The young artist must receive with deference the advice of his elders, not hastily questioning what he does not yet understand, otherwise

his maturity will bear no fruit. The art of seeing nature is a thing almost as much to be acquired as the art of reading the Egyptian hieroglyphics." Constable then gave practical rules for drawing from nature, showing studies of trees made by himself. Among them, one of an ash, which is now at South Kensington, and the words in which he referred to it, though they are not seriously contributive to the subject of his lecture, have for us at least two points of historical value: "Many of my Hampstead friends," he said, "may remember this young lady at the entrance to the village. Her fate was distressing, for it is scarcely too much to say she died of a broken heart. I made this drawing when she was in full health and beauty; on passing some time afterwards I saw, to my grief, that a wretched board had been nailed to her side, on which was written in large letters, *All vagrants and beggars will be dealt with according to law*. The tree seemed to have felt the disgrace, for even then some of the top branches had withered. Two long spikes had been driven far into her side. In another year one half became paralysed, and not long after the other shared the same fate, and this beautiful creature was cut down to a stump, just high enough to hold the board." These passing allusions to the *village* of Hampstead and the *Vagrancy Acts* serve as vivid reminders of the



*Pencil*

STUDY OF ASH TREES

*South Kensington*

To face page 164









*Pencil*

STUDY OF TREES AT HAMPSTEAD

*South Kensington*

To face page 165



industrial and social developments of the seventy years that have elapsed since Constable spoke ; recognising that the world has moved apace, we gain a new appreciation of the extent to which Constable was ahead of his time in his feeling for nature and for art. From a discussion of the drawings he passes to what is the central thought of his discourse—the love of natural scenery implanted in the mind of man. There is a savour that is almost Meredithian in the thesis : “ His nature is congenial with the elements of the planet itself, and he cannot but sympathise with its features, its various aspects, and its phenomena in all situations ” ; and it is developed by considering the successful identification by great writers of the feelings of the mind and external nature. Among the examples chosen are the introductory lines to Winter in Thomson’s *Seasons*, Milton’s description of Adam’s first awakening to the glories of the animate and inanimate world, and the passage in which the army of the Cherubim, conducting Adam and Eve from Paradise, are likened to the evening mist. Quotations from Paley and Bishop Andrews are given ; but the lecturer’s point is the universality of the instinct of admiration for the works of nature, and so his witnesses are drawn from various ages and separated lands. Martin Luther, standing beneath a starlit sky, gives

expression to his reverence and awe. And Cardinal Bembo writes from Padua, in April 1530, to the Pope at Bologna: "While your highness has been these last days on the theatre of the world, among so many lords and great men, whom none now alive have ever seen together before, and has placed on the head of Charles V. the rich, splendid, and honoured crown of the Empire, I have been residing in my little village, where I have thought on you in a quiet and, to me, dear delicious solitude. I have found the country above the usage of any former years, from the long serenity of these gliding months, and by the sudden mildness of the air, already quite verdant, and the trees in full leaf. Even the vines have deceived the peasantry by their luxuriance, which they were obliged to prune. I do not remember to have seen at this time so beautiful a season. Not only the swallows, but all other birds that do not remain with us in the winter, but return to us in the spring, have made this new, and soft, and joyous sky resound with their charming melodies. I could not, therefore, regret your festivities at Bologna."

## CHAPTER VIII

### CHARACTERISTICS

AN account of Constable as a critic, which consisted merely of a digest of his lectures, would be wholly incomplete. He was not primarily a theorist, and his most searching criticisms were evoked at times when his sound common sense and practical knowledge were offended by some person or object before his eyes. Examples of such occasions occur in letters quoted already, and in Leslie's pages many more are to be found. In January of 1833 the artist writes to his biographer: "I have called on poor Lee. I did not think his things were quite so bad. They pretend to nothing but an imitation of nature ; but then it is of the coldest and meanest kind. He is immersed in white lead, and oil, and black, all of which he dashes about on the canvas without the smallest remorse." And "I had on Friday a long visit from Mr. — alone ; but my pictures do not come into his rules or whims of

the art, and he said I had ‘lost my way.’ I told him I had, ‘perhaps, other notions of art than picture admirers have in general. I looked on pictures *as things to be avoided*, connoisseurs looked on them as things to be imitated; and that, too, with such a deference and humbleness of submission, amounting to a total prostration of mind and original feeling, as must serve only to fill the world with abortions.’” Earlier, he had written of a friend of Leslie’s to whom his picture gallery had been mentioned: “But should your endeavours draw him into it, can you give him understanding? ‘One man may lead a horse to the pond, &c.’ I should be delighted, however, to have him in my room, as it would be nuts to me to see him so puzzled. Lord N—— is a better creature, but he esteems ‘our own Glover’ too much like our *disowned* Constable. One picture he had by Glover, the foreground of which consisted of one hundred flower-pots all in a row as thus,” (here a sketch); “the sun was shining bright, but they cast no shadow. Varley, the astrologer, has just called on me, and I have bought a little drawing of him. He told me how to ‘do landscape,’ and was so kind as to point out all my defects. The price of the drawing was ‘a guinea and a half *to a gentleman*, and a guinea only to an *artist*’; but I insisted on his taking the larger sum, as he had clearly proved to me that I

was no artist. This morning I have seen ——'s studies in Italy and Greece—temples, trees, statues, waterfalls, figures, &c. &c ; excellent of their kind, and done wholly for the *understanding*; bald and naked—nature divested of her chiaroscuro, which she never is under any circumstances ; for we never see but through a medium. These things have wonderful merit and so has *watch-making*." He writes to Fisher in July of 1824 that he has just been to the house of a Mr. Otley, and has seen "an abundance of his own things, which gave me a great deal of pain—so laborious, so tasteless, so useless, but very plausible." And when asked how quickly a feeling for the works of Domenichino might be acquired, he replied : "In about the same time you may acquire a relish for the writings of Homer." The pungency of his criticism is not, however, always reserved for questions of art. He exclaims of a person with whom he is forced into contact by circumstances : "More overbearing meekness I never met with in any one man" ; and to his milkman he wrote : "In future we shall feel obliged if you will send us the milk and the water in separate cans." To Leslie he says : "P —— called yesterday. I joked him at first on the folly of fighting with windmills, but he is quite confirmed in the boundless notions he entertains *on the wrong side of everything*" ; and Archdeacon Fisher's inquiry whether

the sermon just preached had been approved by his friend, met with the unexpected response: "Very much indeed, Fisher, I always did like that sermon."

Constable's friendship with the Archdeacon was secure. Moreover, in his case, the plain speaking was not all on one side; Fisher in his letters repeats criticism which has come to his ears, and, he believes, may prove serviceable to the artist.\* But with mere acquaintances such quickness of speech was often ill-timed, and Leslie laments Constable's inability to discriminate between persons capable of receiving correction in matters of taste and those who saw in his antagonisms mere perversity and whimsical liking of paradox. His sharpness was, however, little more than a trick assumed as a humour, by a person on the defensive; and a defence, effective in an age when obvious sensitiveness was the hall-mark of worth and gentility, in a time of subtler self-consciousness appears neither baffling nor original. Constable's mind was, in this respect, of the not uncommon type which, nervously scenting warfare, feels that its best chance lies in presenting the ultimatum and securing a target for shots about to be fired. Hypersensitive to criticism, he encased himself in spiked armour; an unguarded surface would have revealed its fissures to the first thrusts of

\* Fisher's letters, November 13, 1812, and November 13, 1824.



close opposition. The penalty of such a defence is the fact that, of necessity, it is a disguise which prevents the positive qualities of the wearer from being seen except by the few persons, and at the rare moments, when he feels himself safe in undress. These few persons, very few in Constable's case, included Leslie and Fisher, and of the two friendships that with Fisher had the advantage of beginning earlier in life. In such details of this relation as have already been given, its quality to some extent must have been evident, and where space cannot be afforded to a delineation of the Archdeacon's character, it is obviously impossible to record it in full. There are, however, natures whose enduring affection is in itself a testimony to those for whom, and by whom, it is sustained. And John Fisher's was of these. His affection for Constable found so many practical outlets, channelled such various ways to considerate and generous action, that it seldom fell back upon words. But on the rare occasions when he spoke of his feeling his expression was not lacking in force. In April of 1829 he wrote: "My dear friend,—I discovered in an old pocket-book this day an extract from Milton's prose works. *When* I made it, and from *which* of his works, I forget. But this I remember, that I meant to send it you, saying what I now say—that it is the principle on which my

friendship for you is founded. You know that I do not use words in mere flattery. 'As to other points, what God may have determined for me I know not; but this I know, that if ever he instilled an intense love of moral beauty into the breast of any man, He has instilled it into mine. Ceres, in the fable, pursued not her daughter with a greater keenness of inquiry than I have, day and night, the idea of Perfection. Hence, whenever I find a man despising the false estimates of the vulgar, and daring to aspire, in sentiment, language, and conduct, to what the highest wisdom, through every age, has taught us as most excellent, to him I unite myself by a sort of necessary attachment. And if I am so influenced, by nature or by destiny, that by no exertion or labour of my own, I may exalt myself to the summit of worth and honour, yet no powers of heaven and earth will hinder me from looking with reverence and affection upon those who have thoroughly attained to that glory.'” The words are exalted, but the friendship between the two men was sustained on a level that warrants their use. Fisher was an amateur artist, and painting was therefore the pursuit they peculiarly shared; but their correspondence embraces a wide range of topics and leaves few of the vital interests of life untouched. Unlike his friend, the Archdeacon was scholarly and a great reader. In

his letters he constantly sends Constable extracts from books he is reading and, from time to time, he conveys, with special pleasure, a quotation which serves to support his friend's cherished conviction of the danger of imitation and reliance on classical models.\* In general and literary subjects the Archdeacon is the richer, and gives from his storehouse ; but it is interesting to note his deference to Constable in matters concerning the history of Art. In March of 1822 he writes : " Coxe is on the eve of publishing *Correggio* ; but he has some sad stuff in it about the manner in which he is supposed to have mixed his colours, and talks about his painting on gold leaf to produce a warm effect. He will send you, by my advice, the proof sheets of that part of his work which treats of Correggio's art for your correction." And Constable replies : " I have not seen any of the sheets of Mr. Coxe's *Life of Correggio* ; but I hear of a letter from him to Jackson expressing a desire that they may be seen by his friend Constable. There is no doubt but it will be interesting ; but as to painting on gold grounds, it is all over with the *alchemy* of the art, and I hope never to be revived again. Yet dark ages may return, and there are always dark minds in enlightened ones. In the early German and Italian pictures gold was used for glories, &c., and made to appear as a thing

\* See Fisher's letters, November 2, 1824, April 10, 1825, &c.

unconnected with the painting, and so far supernatural ; and this has been done as late as Carlo Dolci, and it sometimes appears very beautiful when blended into transparent colour behind the heads of saints, &c. But still it looks like trick, and Correggio was above all trick, nor do I believe he ever resorted to any such nonsense to aid his brightness ” ; and again : “ I must talk to you about *Coxe's Life of Correggio*. He has made such confusion and nonsense about art, with the letter of A. Carracci ; and the letter itself is so beautiful.” And the following notes, written in July 1829 and 1831 show that the Archdeacon's estimate of the value of his friend's opinion was shared by others and built upon a sounder basis than that of personal predilection : “ If you have not,” says Constable to Fisher, “ your book of Claude's etchings at Salisbury, will you procure it ? as it contains his epitaph and some memoranda, and I am engaged to give a sketch of his character to prefix to a book of engravings, now making from the National Gallery.” And to Leslie, who has asked for his opinion on a copy he is making of Watteau's *Ball* : “ I missed you on the day we should have met at the school of painting by about half an hour. Your Watteau looked colder than the original, which seems as if painted in honey—so mellow, so tender, so soft, and so delicious—so I trust yours will be ; but be satisfied

if you touch but the hem of his garment, for this inscrutable and exquisite thing would vulgarise even Rubens and Paul Veronese."

A collection of opinions on Constable's paintings, gleaned from the pages of his contemporaries, would prove excellent reading; for shortly after his death his work roused fierce controversy and, among persons pretending to taste, was usually heartily liked, or disliked. The views of three prominent men may be gathered, in outline, from the following letter written by Fitzgerald to Tennyson in 1841: "I have just concluded, with all the throes of imprudent pleasure, the purchase of a large picture by Constable, of which, if I can continue in the mood, I will enclose you a sketch. It is very good; but how you and Morton would abuse it! Yet this, being a sketch, escapes some of Constable's faults and might escape some of your censures. The trees are not splashed with that white sky-mud which (according to Constable's theory) the earth scatters up with her wheels in travelling so briskly round the sun." But the multiplication of forgeries of Constable's paintings is, after all, the most final testimony to the increased popularity of his work. Leslie, writing shortly after his friend's death, said: "Some of his sketches have been 'finished' into worthlessness, and, what is a still greater injury to his reputation, entire forgeries have



been made of his works. Multitudes of these have I seen." And Captain Charles Constable declared, during the storm of controversy raised by the appearance of three spurious Constables at a sale in Foster's Rooms in 1869: "For one genuine picture offered for sale there are six sham ones. I have seen them at auctions, at dealers, and in the houses of gentlemen who have been imposed on."\* Many of these forgeries have been exposed and destroyed, but enough remain still in existence to make the cataloguing of Constable's sketches now in private collections a thankless, if not an impossible, task. Technical rules for distinguishing between the real and the supposed works of the artist, serviceable enough guides so far as they go, have been given by Mr. C. J. Holmes. But underlying all Constable's work there is a strong individuality which, once recognised, is seen to be fundamental; and, in consequence, an eye thoroughly used to his style, even though it may not be that of an expert, is not easily deceived. And for this needful familiarising and training the collection of drawings and paintings in the Museum at South Kensington offers unparalleled facilities. The pictures having been bequeathed to the Nation by Miss Isabel Constable, their authenticity is unimpeachable; and they are sufficiently numerous to

\* Quoted in *Constable and His Influence on Landscape Painting*.







267 28

Pencil

READING, FROM THE RIVER

South Kensington

To face page 177

be thoroughly representative of the artist's general development and variations in manner.

The large pictures in the collection have been considered already, but a short notice of a few of the sketches and studies it includes may not be out of place here. The student, whose previous knowledge of the artist has been derived from his larger paintings in the National Gallery, and modern engravings of *The Cornfield* and *The Haywain*, cannot fail, on visiting the Museum, to be impressed and surprised at the range of Constable's aspiration and achievement. Here he appears painstaking often, restless and over-brilliant sometimes, but dull and commonplace, seldom or never. A tinted pencil sketch, *Windsor Castle from the River*,\* dated May 7, 1802, is proof that, before challenging criticism as a painter, Constable knew how to draw; the architecture is treated with tenderness and delicacy, the composition is original, and the whole effect of exactitude without minuteness, and breadth without vagueness, is suggestive of Turner. On the opposite side of the same screen is an exquisite little pencil drawing, *View near Salisbury*.† The foreground slopes up to the cathedral, which rises on the sky line just beyond the summit of the hill. The foreground is empty, save for a flock of sheep followed by a shepherd,

\* No. 804.

† No. 824.

on the narrowing road which curves upwards and into the picture. This device of leading the eye upwards by means of figures or animals with their backs turned to the spectator is common with Constable, and almost always successful; it may be noted in *Yarmouth Jetty*, *The Cornfield*, *The Haywain*, the *Hampstead Heath* exhibited in 1830, and innumerable drawings and sketches. In many cases the animals are naturally moving away from the spectator in the picture, but in others the artist's observation of country life has afforded him more complicated expedients for attaining his object. Sometimes, as in the 1830 *Hampstead Heath*,\* a horse is represented standing unharnessed, with head turned to its fellow, while a cart is being unloaded; at others, a spare horse is tied behind an empty waggon, which is advancing from the foreground into the picture. The success of these devices is of course largely due to the artist's skill in foreshortening. This is most remarkable in the treatment of the horse and cart in *Yarmouth Jetty*; but it is sufficiently evident in the front horse, turned at right angles, in the *Cart and Horses* of the illustration. Constable's skill in registering in his memoranda the essentials of a scene has been remarked in an earlier chapter in connection with the pencil drawings of *Reading* and *Abingdon*

\* See illustration, facing page 90.



*Sketch in Oils*

CART AND HORSES

*South Kensington*

To face page 178









*Oil*

STEM OF AN ELM TREE

*South Kensington*

To face page 179

*Bridge*, and the illustrations, *Study of Ash Trees* and *Study of Trees, Hampstead*, may serve as witnesses to what has been asserted of his power in more delicate and detailed drawings.

Among the most beautiful of the oil sketches at South Kensington is the *Study of an Elm Tree*; it is lovely in tone and colour and might serve as an illustration of Benjamin West's maxim, "light and shadow never stand still." Even in the reproduction, something of the vibration of the sunlight remains. Lovely, too, is the *Study of Tree Stems* with its opposition of moss green and steel grey in the trunks of the beeches. The sketch is very simple in composition; in the foreground, slightly to the left, are the stems of two trees, their lowest branches just showing overhead; the space that remains is occupied by a steep uphill slope rising till it meets the greenery of the branches; in the middle distance a woman, with her back to the spectator, is ascending the slope. But in conception and manipulation it is a brilliant piece of work practicable only to a man who was thoroughly skilled in his craft. No sky is to be seen, but the whole is suffused and penetrated with sunlight. Among the smaller oil sketches is *Stacking Hay*, which, though it has not been noted by the critics, is in purity and delicacy one of the most notable; in it the artist has succeeded absolutely in

rendering the peculiar grey-green colour of grass that has been newly dried in the sun.

Of the water-colour sketches, perhaps the most lovely is *Stoke Pogis Churchyard*, with its bright, clear colour, and opposition of speeding clouds and mellowing, tranquil earth. *Old Sarum* is beautiful and impressive, and in it Constable has achieved the effect of storm-blue in the sky, at which he has unsuccessfully aimed in the *Stonehenge* hanging near by. This *Stonehenge*,\* exhibited in the last year of his life, was presumably worked up from the smaller sketch † of the subject in which the position of the rainbows is more intelligible.

It may be remembered that in October of 1822 Constable reported to Fisher from Hampstead that during the summer he had made about fifty careful sky studies. And Leslie remarks that, at the date of writing, twenty of these, painted in oil on thick paper, are in his possession and all have the time of day and direction of wind noted upon them. Writing to George Constable in December 1836 the artist notes that his observations of clouds and skies are, as yet, on scattered pieces of paper, but he hopes to unite them for a lecture to be delivered at Hampstead in the following summer. He died before the summer

\* No. 1629.

† Dated January 15, 1820.



*Water-colour*

STONEHENGE

*South Kensington*  
To face page 180





arrived, and no manuscript on the subject was to be discovered among his papers. Yet his theories and aspirations in some degree remain to us in the long letter\* on the treatment of skies already quoted, which contains the declaration, "the sky must, and always shall, with me make an effectual part of the composition." That boast was made good; in every picture of Constable's the sky is essential; in many it is the most beautiful feature of the whole, and in some it is distractingly predominant. The best known of his exercises in the subject is *The Study of Clouds*† at South Kensington, but—attractive as it is—when compared with the sky studies of Turner and even of Ruskin, it must be pronounced slightly indeterminate in outline. The whole effect is good, but the cloudlets themselves are lacking in character and definition. Irreproachable in this respect is an oil sketch,‡ which, though it includes a foreground, is in reality a sky study, hanging slightly to the right upon the same wall. It represents, above the tops of some elms, a cumulus cloud, faintly tinged with pink, moving across a cold sky. The cloud is full and massive without opacity, and its appearance is magnificent against patches of glacial blue. The effect of fulness and depth is attained by the most

\* October 23, 1821.

† No. 590.

‡ No. 157.

subtle, and at first sight indistinguishable, gradations of colour.

The caustic habit of speech, already described, was the sole crookedness of Constable's nature. His character in all other respects was as direct and unaffected as his work, and in his life there are no subtle or complex influences to be estimated. His story is unrelieved by any touch of mystery or "romance," and the record of the development of his art is a chronicle of domestic events. Leslie remarks that, except for youthful excursions to Derbyshire and the Lakes, he never travelled to find subjects for his pictures. In Bergholt, Salisbury, Osington, Hampstead, Gillingham, Brighton, and Folkestone, circumstances provided a foreground of personal human association, and these were the places he painted. But, when we have said that the region of abstract ideas was unfamiliar to Constable, and that his habits of thought were objective and particular, we have merely stated characteristics common in every generation, and emphasised an attitude of mind which the journalist is only too ready to label as early-Victorian. The positive qualities of the painter's life and work are yet to seek. And these are indicated by Fisher when he compares Constable's habits of observation to those of White in his *Natural History of Selborne*, and his mental outlook with that of Paley in his *Sermons*. He belonged to a

society less specialised and subdivided than our own, and we must be content to estimate his individuality in moral, rather than intellectual, terms. His almost unique position among his contemporaries was due to his absolute single-heartedness and sincerity. He refused to follow the idealists of his time in seeking in artificiality an easy way of escape from the sordid conditions that surrounded him. And the truthfulness that saved him from his contemporaries' error of confounding size with splendour, also withheld him from his successors' confusion of vagueness with imagination.

## CHAPTER IX

### GENERAL ESTIMATE

WE may infer how little recognition was accorded to Constable's work during his lifetime, from the following statement made by Mr. R. C. Leslie, in re-editing his father's biography of the artist, in 1894 : "About sixty years ago," he says, "I remember seeing all Constable's more important works upon the walls of a large studio formed by him out of the drawing-room of 35 Charlotte Street, Fitzroy Square. When he died the greater number of these, after being bought in for the family by my father and other friends at his sale in Foster's Rooms, remained crowded together on the walls of a small house in St. John's Wood, which then became the home of his children ; and, with the exception of a portion allotted to his second son, Captain C. Constable, which have since been sold, all these pictures and studies remained there until, on the death, in 1888, of his last surviving

daughter Isabel, they became the property of the Nation." The prices realised by the paintings in Foster's Rooms are given in the Appendix, and the sums which the pictures would command to-day, in comparison with these, appear immense. Constable's recognition among artists and connoisseurs may be termed complete, and with a wider and more general public, his popularity is on the increase. Since the artist's death the intelligent English workman has gained access to picture galleries, and now has at least a casual acquaintance with the works of the greatest painters among his countrymen. To him the homeliness of subject in Constable's pictures makes an immediate appeal, and, if he or his forbears should chance to be natives of Suffolk, his enthusiasm is unbounded. Since the year 1893 Messrs. Cook and Sons have included in their list of tours *A Visit to Constable's Country*, and the fact reveals the admiration entertained for the artist by our Continental and American visitors in a way that is incontrovertible. It would, however, be interesting to discover in what spirit these pilgrimages are made. On one occasion an elegant and attractive American woman passed by me to stand before *The Glebe Farm* in the National Gallery. She regarded the picture for a moment, then, by an inclination of her

head, summoned her son—a typical undergraduate—to her side: “Does this thrill you?” she asked, incorporating in her voice just sufficient suggestion of the vibrant transatlantic tone, to give the question piquancy. The newcomer in his turn scrutinised the picture: “Not the least in the world,” he said, and together they passed on. Substituting for “thrill” our more placid English equivalent “move,” we may regard the incident as representative of an attitude of mind increasingly common on both sides of the water. The amateur art-critic, secure in his consciousness of general susceptibility, places himself before a work of art and anticipates some immediate stirring of the senses. Believing himself devoid of prejudices or preconceptions he imagines his attitude to be one of catholicity, and is chiefly conscious of the moderation of his requirements. He will willingly forego style, rhythm, or gradation, if the work before him do but “speak to the soul.” This requisition of a stimulus that is immediate, modern impressionism has created and is well calculated to meet. Constable’s art, in so far as it was based on the sound and solid traditions of the past, is lacking throughout in the startling and bizarre combinations, which offer the cheaper forms of response to such an appeal, and it must be acknowledged that *The Glebe*



*Farm* is one of the least interesting of his works. But to dismiss even the poorest of his pictures with the judgment that has been described is crude and unimaginative. If the speakers had but moved across the same room in which *The Glebe Farm* is hung, to consider Sir George Beaumont's *Jacques* and *The Wounded Stag*, they might have realised something of Constable's achievement, and discovered to some extent the emotional quality of his work.

Constable confounded the authorities of his day by forsaking the studios for the fields and lanes of his birthplace, and averring the impossibility of developing English landscape-painting on the lines of classical tradition. The scenery of Suffolk possesses no outstanding qualities for pictorial representation, but comparison with other localities was not involved; for to Constable's mind no choice presented itself. He instinctively discerned affection for the objects to be portrayed as the essential of his enterprise, and turned for his subjects to the haunts of his boyhood. He entertained no theory as to emotional quality in his paintings, but he could not have presented these scenes unemotionally, even if it had been his desire to do so. His successors have moved too far in the direction thus indicated by him; they have dwelt upon feeling to the exclusion of form, till their experiments approximate

to the presentation of disembodied sentiment on canvas. But their ideal, at least, is the same: they may at times be irreverent in the presence of their mistress, but they, too, conceive of their art as a living and generating force, and see in landscape-painting the outcome of a deepening union between the mind of man and the spirit of nature. Yet in realising the greatness of the revolution he initiated, we must recollect that Constable's revolt from tradition was mainly intuitive. In dealing with every-day affairs, his diffidence amounted to a vice; in his convictions concerning the main lines of his work, he seems to have been singularly free from misgiving.

Colour was, of course, the cardinal point of his schism, and his naturalism and neglect of convention in the treatment of it are most remarkable in relation to the works of his contemporaries. His effects, in this respect, are strikingly modern. They appeared garish to the eyes of his contemporaries, but to the modern critic they seem to merit little but praise. The tale of the violin controversy on the lawn at Cole Orton represents the artist's determination to make his painting realistic in colour. He was, however, too thoroughly schooled in the art of the past to neglect the necessity for a pictorial unity to underlie naturalistic divergence. And the result of the union he attained between the

methods of the old masters of landscape and modern imitation of natural tints, still represents the maximum of achievement in such compromise. In some of Constable's pictures, time has rendered the monochrome foundation unduly obtrusive; in others, it is as fully concealed as when they were painted, and there is no case in which the scattered brilliancy characteristic of his latest manner is not to a great extent redeemed by its moderating and harmonising presence. As a draughtsman he must be ranked far below Gainsborough and Turner, but to say this is in no way to agree in the verdict of incapacity, which Ruskin's deservedly great reputation as an art critic has popularised. To those who have even cursorily regarded the drawings in the Constable collection at South Kensington, proofs and assurances of the artist's acuteness of vision and skill in representation must appear unnecessary, and Ruskin's criticism prejudiced, if not ridiculous. Prejudiced it undoubtedly was; his antagonism had been roused by comparisons between the works of Constable and Turner, and in attempting to expose the foolishness of the critics, he fell into their error of comparing the incomparable. But he nowhere actually asserts that Constable could not draw. His words are: "I have never seen any work of his in which there were signs of his being able to draw, and hence the most necessary

details are painted by him insufficiently"; and he chooses, for comparison with Turner's work, tree forms from *The Lock on the Stour* and *A Dell in Helmingham Park*. In respect of the examples he has selected, Ruskin's condemnation cannot be gainsaid; moreover, it must be admitted that the *Dedham Vale* of 1828, *Arundel Mill*, and even *Salisbury from the Meadows* would have provided yet more forcible material for his argument. It should also be remembered that at the time *Modern Painters* was written, Constable's tree studies and sketches were in private hands, and that Ruskin therefore spoke without knowledge of them. How far they would have prevented his opposition it is, of course, impossible to tell, but we may safely surmise that, in view of their range and facility, the form of his criticism would have been modified.

Constable undoubtedly brought to the painting of landscape a sincerity of purpose that was new. Unlike his predecessors—who had regarded earth and sky as material for composition and combination—he recorded the definite aspects of definite localities at definite hours of the day. He was in no way lacking in appreciation for forms of art other than his own. Of Turner's contributions to the Academy Exhibition of 1828 he wrote: "Turner has some golden visions,

glorious and beautiful. They are only visions, but still, they are art, and one could live and die with such pictures." Nevertheless, practically uninfluenced by his great contemporary, he held strenuously to the path that he had mapped out for himself in youth. Long and painstakingly he learned of his predecessors, but all he ever asked of them was knowledge sufficient to enable him to represent the fields and streams of the country-side in which his boyhood had been spent. If his aim had been less exact, his work would have been unimportant. Ruskin has averred that his tastes were "low," and in one sense the accusation is just. Things homely and familiar held the chief place in his affections. But the fact was his safeguard. It was because he chose as his models the objects by which he was surrounded and for which his feeling was sincere; because he was content to propose to himself an apparently simple task, that he was able, by recognising his limitations, to transcend them. He was, in fact, devoid of the visionary power, the constructive imagination, essential to a grander, more heroic method. He did well not to wander in "the vacant fields of idealism": to him they would have remained vacant. He preferred to approach Nature in the humbler guise of the realist; and his faithfulness did not pass unrewarded. For there are times when his work rises spontaneously



to that subtler and more searching insight, which is rightly associated with the ideal.

But where, it may be asked, in a scheme of such unassuming realism was place found for impressionist representations of sunlight and storm? The answer is suggested by the fact that the paintings of these effects belong to Constable's middle life. As time went on, and he succeeded in transferring to canvas the tangible aspects of scene after scene that he loved, it was natural and inevitable that he should penetrate to the more elusive and transient effects in which from time to time they were revealed or enwrapped. The first fruits of this new penetration appear in the sketches at South Kensington. But these sketches, it should be remembered, were not regarded by him as serious or finished productions, nor given to the public during his lifetime. After they were made, in middle and later life, he aimed at incorporating the effects they represented in large pictures, such as *Salisbury from the Bishop's Garden*, which can in no way be considered to be lacking in tangibility. It has already been remarked that in the *Salisbury* Constable's spots and splashes of pure pigment, representing sunlight, first make their appearance. In this picture, the new feeling for brilliance \*

\* It may be objected that attention was previously drawn to the masterly representation of sunshine in the *Boat-building*, exhibited





*Wash*

WINDMILL ON DOWNS NEAR BRIGHTON

*South Kensington*

To face page 192







*Oil Painting*

A MILL NEAR BRIGHTON

*South Kensington*

To face page 193

gives a hardness to the architecture and a broken distracting appearance to the whole. The artist has not yet learned to treat his solid objects in the true light of his new-found pleasure in atmospheric effect, and is, seemingly, forgetful that the brightness of noon-day involves somewhere in a representation a corresponding depth of shade. The conflicting claims of these two interests—his habitual uncompromising realism of fact, and his newer insistence on the vivid actuality of light—are accountable for the want of focus, the *all-overishness* of many of the paintings produced by Constable in middle life. Later still, in the years between 1825 and 1837, he makes little or no attempt to sustain the balance; it becomes obvious that his interest is centred in the representation of brilliancy and movement. But the difference between the earlier and later works lies in matter more than in method. The method is as realistic as before; the artist has merely annexed a whole realm of the elusive and intangible to his world of fact and of law. Yet the result of this unpremeditated and almost unconscious extension of aim is an unparalleled artistic development. It rendered the same painter chargeable with a literalness that is

seven years earlier. But, in that picture, the level and suffused brightness of the atmosphere was produced by traditional methods, no advance in definition and actuality being attempted.

commonplace, on the one hand, with “ the blotting and blundering of modernism ” on the other ; and involved, in the work of one man and one lifetime, the passage of landscape art across the gulf that separates the methods of the old masters and the new.



## CHAPTER X

### CONSTABLE'S INFLUENCE ON LANDSCAPE PAINTING

LANDSCAPE-PAINTING in France at the opening of the nineteenth century had sunk to the degraded and nerveless condition which has been described in the introductory chapter, and as we are not here concerned with pre-Revolutionary naturalism, it is sufficient to realise that, in 1819, French landscape had for thirty years been stereotyped and lifeless, and that for this period "classical" landscape and the school of David had reigned supreme. Its absolute authority had indeed been impugned by the "Gothic" school of painters, who went back from Valenciennes to Claude himself for inspiration, and produced some really forcible drawings of Italy, Greece, and Eastern lands. But their work, though it possessed a directness that made it heterodox to the classicist, was tied to the past by the nature of its subject. Obviously, face to face with the

scenery of Italy and Greece, a painter equipped with a tradition based on the writings of Plutarch, Virgil and Ovid, and the examples of Claude Lorraine, might strike a mean between actuality and convention impracticable to members of the same school who were elaborating pictures in the environs of Paris. Yet, for French landscapists to travel to alien lands in search of subjects amenable to their art was but to place the problem one step farther back, and the movement, in relation to general artistic progress, had represented a fuller and more logical recognition of the inelastic nature of the accepted tradition. But early in the century, the spirit which in life and art had been partially overlaid by the events of the Napoleonic epoch—the leaven of modern Romanticism—was stirring and abroad, and at this point French and English influences begin inextricably to intertwine. The facts of the reception accorded in France to the writings of Scott and Byron are too familiar to need insistence. Delacroix has testified to the influence of Bonington in French art as early as 1817, praising his dexterity in water-colours, “at this time an English novelty,” and the Salon of 1822 contained paintings by Bonington, Copley Fielding and Robson. Meanwhile, among French artists themselves the reaction against classicism had manifestly begun. Michel and Huet were attempting

in landscape what in historical painting Delacroix had largely achieved. Their influence on the general public was not great, for after 1814 Michel was excluded from the Salon as a revolutionary, and Huet was only "discovered" in days when the battle of the romanticists had been won. But the quality of the work of these two artists and their position as pioneers of the new movement, have been insufficiently realised by the critics, who attribute the revolution in French landscape-painting directly and exclusively to Constable. It is obviously impossible to apportion influences exactly in so many-sided a revolution, but a careful consideration of the facts suggests that Constable's share in the movement has been slightly exaggerated, because it has been inaccurately defined.

The development of landscape-painting in England between the years 1800 and 1830 was unrivalled in any other country of Europe. The brilliant careers of Cozens and Girtin had ended, but Crome, Turner, Bonington, Müller, Cotman, Cox and De Wint were at work. Modern water-colour painting, invented by Cozens and Girtin, and developed by Cotman, Cox and De Wint, Turner had brought to full stature at one bound. In his hands the province of colour had been extended and enlarged, and painting, deprived so long of the wealth that was her birthright, had come

again unto her own. And it is surely necessary to regard these men and others among Constable's artistic contemporaries as working on lines parallel with, rather than emanating from, his development. It is, of course, impossible to regard Turner as being seriously indebted to any painter of his generation; Crome knew little or nothing of English art, and Cotman, De Wint, and Cox were too far removed in circumstances from Constable's influence to be in any way considered as his disciples. Bonington, though he was an Englishman, from the age of fifteen until his death at twenty-seven, made his home in France. It is true that his frequent visits to London enabled him to keep in touch with English art, and that he owed to Constable a good deal of his skill in the representation of atmospheric brilliancy; but much of the facility to which the success of his work is attributable was learned in French studios and from French artists. And, though his painting when compared with Constable's is superficial and trifling, he represented a union of the qualities of the French and English schools which made him, in some measure at least, a separate influence, and, until his death in 1828, he continued to exhibit in the Salon side by side with Constable. It is clear then, that the time was one of unusual vitality in English art, and that the influence of individual English artists had been felt in Paris

prior to the exhibition of Constable's pictures in 1824. The Salon of that year, at which *The Haywain* made its appearance, included works by Copley Fielding, Harding, Prout, and Varley. Even the newspaper critics of the two preceding exhibitions had pleaded for more reality and national feeling in landscape-painting, and the time for change was ripe.

It is common to speak of Constable as the founder of the impressionist school of painting in France. Such is not the fact. At the time when his paintings appeared in Paris, the romanticism of Michel and Huet had gained many adherents, and was about to find most vivid expression in the drawings of Victor Hugo. Moreover, the incident most often brought forward in proof of Constable's absolute initiation of the new movement is a witness to its double aspect. This is the fact that in the four days that intervened after he had seen Constable's works before the opening of the exhibition, Delacroix completely repainted his *Massacre de Scio*. He had found, and ever after was the first to acknowledge, the guidance he needed; but he would not have been in a position to profit by it, had not his own great naturalistic picture been completed. Delacroix has been termed the Byron of painting, and he had led the young enthusiasts of romanticism in their revolt. In his search for passion



and vitality, he had revelled in wild scenes and oriental subjects, but his attainment had fallen short of his desire. The truth seems to be that the opposing camps of classicism and romanticism were both conventional. Romantic painting, affording more play for individual expression, in comparison with stereotyped classicism, had life. But it relied for vitality almost exclusively on the personality of the painter. The young romantics rightly discerned that art must be the expression of emotion, but their tendency was to superimpose arbitrary feeling rather than to make their work the vehicle of that which was inherent in their subject. And this individualistic standpoint made them necessarily representatives of the school which, culminating in Maeterlinck, attempts to enhance the value of the "spiritual" and atmospheric by blurring or neglecting the actual and tangible. And the drawings of the painter-poets, such as Hugo, Merimée, and Gautier, are sufficient proof that the spirit expressing itself as "romanticism" in literature took the form of impressionism in painting. It is therefore manifestly unlikely, that impressionism would be the first quality to strike French artists in *The Haywain* and *The White Horse*. And it is much more probable that the paintings made their immediate appeal by virtue of a naturalism that, in two respects, was unique. These



respects were : Constable's fearless adoption of "unpicturesque" localities as subjects for his pictures, and his practice of using fresh bright colour which, though the French had admired it in the work of the English water-colourists, they had not attempted to emulate in what they considered more serious painting.

But if we thus realise the nature of Constable's contribution to the problem which French art was attempting to solve, and the fact that the immediate effect of the exhibition of his works in Paris was, in part, fortuitous, it will be difficult to over-estimate the serviceableness of his example. Men of more imaginative temperament might find in the plains and hills of their native land sentiments other than those that he had found ; but it was he who had indicated the source from which their inspiration was to be drawn, and pointed them the way to a new kingdom. From 1824 to 1830 a group of men, almost all of them city-bred, were occupied in taking possession of a realm which had lain undiscovered at their doors. They were painting Paris and its immediate surroundings—Marly, St. Cloud, Croissy, and Fontainebleau—and by the end of the year 1831 the most notable of them had made their home in Barbizon, a forest village three miles from Fontainebleau. The only inn in the place was a barn roughly modified to meet the requirements of the visitors ; but the fact was immaterial

to the newcomers, who used the building only as a sleeping place. Their life was passed in the forest, and there, in holes in rocks and trees they stored their meals and materials for their painting. That they were not shallow enthusiasts in love with a pose is sufficiently proved by the variety of the inspiration drawn by the various members of this new school from the same source. Théodore Rousseau's method of work is the very antithesis of that practice of using natural scenery as the medium of personal expression alluded to in connection with the romanticists. Instead of reading phases of nature in the light of his own moods and preconceptions, Rousseau's aim was the unalloyed and unprejudiced representation of her spirit. And to this end he painted every aspect of the country about Barbizon, manifesting it impartially under all circumstances and in every guise. The pictures of Diaz, on the other hand, came always from the heart of the forest. His work in Fontainebleau consisted almost entirely of paintings of trees, and of these he usually represented little more than their stems. Such differences might be multiplied, but a detailed account of these artists has no place here. Of one, however, of the early group of settlers at Barbizon, a man who, in 1830, was already fifty years of age, a somewhat fuller mention must be made. Born in 1776, Camille Corot

received in his youth the ordinary academic training of a French artist, and his first exhibited picture, hung by the side of the works of Bonington and Constable in the Salon of 1827, was an Italian landscape of the old tradition; and it was not till 1843 that he finally turned from Italian to French landscape. But his nature ripened with advancing years, and from 1844 till his death in 1875 was the fruitful period of his art. Exquisitely sensitive and with a passion for music, first at Barbizon and afterwards in Paris, Corot allowed his imagination free play. For forty years he had studied and practised unremittingly in other men's methods, and by this long training in conventional exactitude he had been unconsciously maturing his own genius—and his genius was essentially spontaneous and original. He was not a thinker, and in one sense his range of sympathy and emotion is narrow; he may even be accused of a certain obviousness of taste in his choice of subject. Birches, alders, and aspens, zephyrs and cloudlets, at tranquil sunrise and sunset, these things would have seemed to Constable but the well-worn stock-in-trade of the ordinary artist. To Corot they appeared spiritually irradiated and informed, in direct relation to the evanescence and pliability of their material. Frailty and delicacy were to him the instruments of a voice

unheard in the earthquake or the storm. So completely was he master of his medium that at times he seems to transcend it, and, with the utmost reserve of colour and outline, surround us, not with some particular place, but with an all-pervading atmosphere of tenderness and of comfort. Corot was neither a realist nor a romanticist, but in his work the essential qualities of both were united. His skies and fields and trees are an avenue to that which is behind their semblances, and as such they must be represented truly or they will mislead. His development was made possible by the existence of the school that Constable stimulated, and from him, the poet-painter of Barbizon, most of what is valuable in English landscape-painting of to-day has been derived.

Why, it may be asked, has Constable's influence reached us by so circuitous a route? Had the England of his day no artists or picture-buyers capable of adopting or appreciating his method? The answer involves the further question as to whether a moderate degree of financial success rewarded the efforts of the greatest artists of his time? We have seen already that private circumstances rendered Constable in a large measure independent of the necessity of finding a ready market for his work. In consequence, he was able to develop on his own lines, and the art of Europe was

enriched. But this can only be regarded as a fortunate accident when we remember that it was by inheritance, and not by recompense, that he was sustained. Cotman, with his depth of feeling and delicate mastery of design, laboured all his life as a teacher of drawing for the barest subsistence, and died, worn out, at the age of sixty. Cox and De Wint have been accused of debasing their powers, painting down to the popular taste, and producing pictures that were "pretty" and marketable. Yet neither of them accumulated wealth in any way proportionate to the value of their work, or received one-tenth of the price their paintings at the present time would command. The performance of these men—the masters of English landscape-painting—outstripped the taste of their age. Writing in 1863, in his *Histoire de Peintres, École anglaise*, Bürger remarked that, though Constable's example had stimulated in France a school of painting unrivalled in the modern world, it had been absolutely without effect in his own country, which since his day had not produced a single real painter of landscape. And as covering the period from the death of Constable's great contemporaries to the date at which it was written, the estimate is just.\* There was indeed an extraordinary demand for the

\* Cotman died in 1842, De Wint in 1849; Cox indeed lived on till 1858, but the period of his real activity ended in 1852 or 1853.



paintings and reproductions of landscapists, and from 1820 to 1870 many were at work. But it would be a mistake to attribute this demand to increased artistic susceptibility. From 1815 to 1860 the commercial classes in England were rising in prosperity and importance. The fall of Napoleon had re-opened Europe to the English, and the travelling class of earlier days was now augmented by the well-to-do merchant and tradesman. *Landscape Annuals* poured forth in response to the needs of this new public; *The Tourist in Italy and France*, with letter-press by Roscoe and drawings by J. D. Harding, *The Tourist in Spain*, *The Tourist in Portugal*, and another *Italy* with letter-press by Roscoe and drawings by Prout, all appeared in one series.\* Rogers's *Italy*, and Turner's *Coast, Harbour, and Inland* series, afford sufficient proof that the fashion might be moulded to noblest ends, but the demand, being in the main topographical, was chiefly answered by artisans. A host of painters, whose names are now known only to dealers in pictures, grew up and flourished. Some of them made likenesses of places, others concocted "rural landscapes with figures," which by their blueness and greenness were to dwellers in towns

\* To travellers of the fifties and sixties these stood in the relation that photos and picture-postcards occupy now with a further enlarged and not more discriminating public.



reminiscent of their country in general. Above these manufacturers there existed, of course, a certain number of men of the rank of Mason and Walker, but their work was usually either diluted by sentimentality or obscured by pre-Raphaelite over-insistence on detail. Meanwhile, the artists of France had formulated much of what to the painters of Barbizon had been intuitive. Monet, with his fifteen paintings of the haystack in his garden, had carried the scientific imitation of colour to a point from which it could be carried no further. Thus when, in search of true inspiration, the painters of English landscape turned to the study of the work of Parisian artists, they found, on the one hand, in Manet and Monet a realism far surpassing their own; and, on the other, in Corot a poetic simplicity and unity no Englishman had ever attained. And if at home they looked in vain for inspiration, the inspiration they discovered abroad owed its being to the impetus derived from the work of their fellow countryman.



# APPENDIX

## A CATALOGUE OF THE VALUABLE FINISHED WORKS, STUDIES, AND SKETCHES OF JOHN CONSTABLE, Esq., R.A., dec<sup>d</sup>.

Among the Finished Pictures will be found the following Grand Subjects, all of which have been exhibited at the Royal Academy, and afford abundant evidence of the great genius and unwearied application of this distinguished and lamented Artist, viz. :—

Salisbury Cathedral, from the Meadows.	Helmington Park. Salisbury Cathedral from the Bishop's Garden.
Hadleigh Castle.	The Glebe Farm.
View on the River Stour.	Flatford Mills.
The Lock.	Brighton Chain Pier.
View of Dedham, Suffolk.	The Lock at Flatford Mills.
Opening of Waterloo Bridge.	

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A MOST INTERESTING COLLECTION OF  
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At one o'clock each day precisely.

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FIRST DAY'S SALE.

TUESDAY, THE 15TH DAY OF MAY, 1838.

At one o'clock precisely.

OLD AND MODERN MASTERS.

£	s.	d.		Lot.	
4	8		Artois.	1.	A Landscape & figures.
3	5		Van Goyen.	2.	A Landscape with travellers in a cart.

£	s.	d.		Lot.	
1	12	6	D. Teniers.	3.	An Interior by candle-light, a pasticcio of Bassano.
3	10		Everdingen.	4.	A view Norway and Waterfall.
3	10		Artois.	5.	A Landscape.
22	1		R. Wilson.	6.	A pr. of circular pictures—Old Castle and Waterfall—formerly in the possession of Sir George Beaumont.
28	7		De Wytt.	7.	An interior of a cathedral, with numerous figures, a chef d'œuvre.
6	6		Sir J. Reynolds.	8.	A study of a Portrait of Admiral Hardy.
1			Poussin le Mere.	9.	An Architectural picture.
8	18	6	J. Ruysdael.	10.	A small Landscape with chateau.
4	14	6	Wynants.	11.	A Landscape with trees and shrubs.
10	6		Sir J. Reynolds.	12.	A Study for the Portrait of the Duchess of Northumberland.
7	7		Van Goyen.	13.	A Landscape with waggons descending a hill.

£	s.	d.		Lot.
1	12	6	Snyders.	14. Still life and a stag hunt.
4	14	6	J. Ruysdael.	15. Woody Landscape and figures reposing.
5	5		J. Ruysdael.	16. Landscape with cottage & figures.
11	11		Everdingen.	17. View in Norway.
	18		S. Rosa.	18. Upright Landscape with Cupids oval, style of.
7	17	6	Siebrechts.	19. Upright Landscape with water and figures.
42	0	0	Watteau.	20. The Embarkation; formerly in the possession of Sir J. Reynolds.
2	0	0	Van Kessel.	21. Upright Landscape, Van Goyen, and Birds in a Landscape.
6	16	6	D. Teniers.	22. A Landscape with 2 figures in conversation.
11	0	6	Momperts.	23. Mendicants round a fire in a wild Landscape with lake, from Sir W. Beechy's collection.
2	15	0	Boucher.	24. A Landscape, Italian.
4	8	0	R. Wilson.	25. A Landscape and figures.



## APPENDIX

213

£	s.	d.		Lot.
3	6	0		26. An upright landscape, with man trout shooting.
8	8		Guardi.	27. View of a fountain & figures.
4	4		Swaneveldt.	28. An Italian Landscape & figures.
1	11		L. Cranach,	29. Venus & Cupid, A Sibyl, and Adam and Eve.
1	2			30. A Frost piece & a Landscape.
5	15	6		31. A Classical Landscape with the story of Polyphemus, after N. Poussin.
6	16	6	Jackson, R.A.	32. Two Heads, the Banished Lord, &c., after Sir J. Reynolds.
6	6		Jackson, R.A.	33. A pr. of Portraits, Sir George and Lady Beaumont, after Sir J. Reynolds.
8	15		S. Bourdon.	34. A Classical romantic landscape and figures.
44	2		Guardi.	35. St. Mark's Place.
10	0	0	Rembrandt.	36. The Mill, after
10	10	0	Opie.	37. Juliet at the Balcony.
1	1	0	Sir J. Reynolds.	38. A Landscape, a sketch.
1	12		Opie.	39. A Head.

£	s.	d.	Lot,
3	8		Breughel. 40. Animals in a Landscape.
4	14	6	Borgognone. 41. Battle of Cavalry.
7	17	6	Sir G. Beaumont. 42. Three Landscapes.
5	0	0	Sir G. Beaumont. 43. Four ditto.
2	10	0	44. Five pictures — the Entombment, Three Landscapes, and a female head.
15	15		45. A Winter scene from the original, by Jacob Ruysdael, in the possession of Sir R. Peel.
6	16	6	46. Cephalus & Procris, from the original, by Claude, in the National Gallery.
5	15	6	47. The Windmill, from the original picture, by Jacob Ruysdael, in the Dulwich Gallery.
53	11		48. Hagar and the Angel, from the original, by Claude, in the National Gallery.
45	3		49. An upright Landscape, from the original, by Claude, in the National Gallery.
4	4		50. A small upright Landscape, after Ruysdael.
3	10		51. An upright Landscape, after Artois.
9	9		52. The Corn Field, after Jacob Ruysdael.
7	17	6	53. Landscape and cattle, after Rubens.
4	15		54. Five large prepared canvases and 33 smaller ditto.
2	2		55. 25 prepared canvases, 2 roles of D°, and sundry stretching frames.

£	s.	d.	Lot.
5	10		56. A seapiece.
5	0	0	57. A Landscape.
	12	0	58. Upright Landscape.
7	10		59. 2 oval portraits.
1	3		60. 1 portrait.
1	17	6	61. 10 portraits.
2	12	6	62. 7 portraits.
1	7		63. 2 upright Landscapes & a sporting-piece.
3	0	0	64. 4 Landscapes & 2 others.
	12	0	65. 7 Pictures.
1	6		66. 5 Easels.
6	15		67. 12 carved frames.
	5	0	68. 11 frames, various.
2	12	0	69. 2 gilt frames.
3	5	0	70. Entombment.

## SECOND DAY'S SALE.

WEDNESDAY, THE 16TH DAY OF MAY, 1838.

PRECISELY AT ONE O'CLOCK.

SKETCHES, STUDIES, AND FINISHED PICTURES,  
BY M<sup>R</sup>. CONSTABLE.

£	s.	d.	
2	7	6	1. Five Landscapes, painted at an early period.
3	10		2. Six ditto, painted from nature.
4	14	6	3. Two—Stone Henge and an Exterior of a Country Mansion, with a Hatchment.
4	0	0	4. Eight Landscapes, painted from nature.

£	s.	d.	Lot.
2	2		5. Seven Slight Sketches.
8	8		6. Four Landscapes.
10	10		7. Four—Old Gate, Salisbury; House at Hampstead; View at Dedham, and one other.
5	5		8. Six Landscapes.
3	5		9. Six ditto.
3	15		10. Three—The Glebe Farm, Salisbury, and one other.
1	12	6	11. Three—View of a gentleman's House and Park in Berkshire; Sea Shore at Brighton, and a Study of Trees.
9	9		12. Two—Salisbury Cathedral, study for the finished picture, and Helmingham Park.
24	3		13. Two—Salisbury Cathedral and the Glebe Farm.
9	19	6	14. Two—The Corn Field; a study from nature for the picture in the National Gallery and Salisbury from the meadows.
16	5	6	15. Five Sketches for pictures.
4	4		16. Four Ditto.
4	4		17. Three Ditto.
2	12	6	18. Three Ditto.
8	8		19. Three Landscapes.
16	5	6	20. An upright Landscape with Cows.
2	2		21. A Landscape, study from nature.
3	3		22. Three early studies of Landscapes.

£	s.	d.	Lot.
11	11		23. Two—Salisbury Cathedral, and Coleorton Hall, the Seat of Sir G. Beaumont.
17	6	6	24. Two upright Landscapes.
5	15	6	25. Three Landscapes.
8	8		26. View of Dedham, painted from nature.
9	19	6	27. Two small Landscapes, early pictures.
13	13		28. A Study of Trees, very elegant and highly finished.
16	5	6	29. Sketch from a picture—View in Helmingham Park.
16	16		30. Salisbury Cathedral from the Bishop's Garden, nearly finished.
3	13	6	31. Sketch of Hadleigh Castle.
2	15		32. Three Sketches.
24	3		33. Two Views at East Bergholt.
3	10		34. Three—Salisbury Cathedral, the Lock, and 1 other.
52	10		35. River scene and Horse jumping.
12	12		36. Two—Sketch for the picture, View on the Stour, and a Landscape.
6	10		37. Sketch of Salisbury Cathedral, from the meadows.
14	10		38. Two. Sketches of Landscapes, the pictures now in France.
7	17	6	39. Sketch of a Mill on the Stour.
2	10		40. Stoke Church.
4	4		41. Weymouth Bay, a sketch.

£	s.	d.	Lot.
15	0	0	42. Two—Waterloo Bridge and Brighton.
5	5		43. Two—Chain Pier at Brighton and Dedham Church.
4	14	6	44. Two—Hampstead Heath & Waterloo Bridge.
7	7		45. Four—Weymouth Bay, Waterloo Bridge, Dedham Mill, and 1 other.
4	14	6	46. Three. East Bergholt, Dedham, and 1 other.
1	13		47. Five. Weymouth Bay & four others.
5	5		48. Three. Moonlight ; Landscape and a ditto with a rainbow.
31	10		49. Three Sketches, Landscapes.
35	14		50. Salisbury Meadows ; painted from nature.
23	2		51. Study of Trees and Fern ; from nature, with Donkies, &c.
27	6		52. Cottage in a Corn Field.
37	5	6	53. Hampstead Heath, at the ponds.
52	10		54. Flatford Mills, Horse & Barge.
11	0	6	55. The Lock.
17	6	6	56. Hampstead Heath.
37	16		57. Gillingham Mill, Dorsetshire.
5	15	6	58. View at East Bergholt.
51	9		59. View at Flatford, with barge building.
7	7		60. Pair of views in Sussex, n <sup>r</sup> Petworth.
31	10		61. Hampstead Heath, London in the distance.



£	s.	d.	Lot.
11	0	6	62. Pencil drawing, Trees in Mr. Holford's Garden at Hampstead.
7	7		63. Pencil drawing, Trees at East Bergholt.
1	15		64. Small pencil drawing of Trees.
25	4		65. Dedham Vale.
63	0	0	66. View of London, from Hampstead Heath.
34	13	0	67. View of Flatford Mills.
45	3	0	68. Brighton and the Chain Pier.
44	2		69. The Lock near Flatford Mills.
74	11		70. The Glebe Farm.
42	0	0	71. The Cenotaph, erected by Sir George Beaumont to the memory of Sir Joshua Reynolds.
64	1		72. Salisbury Cathedral, from the Bishop's Garden.
56	14		73. View in Helmington Park, Suffolk.
63	0	0	74. The Opening of Waterlow Bridge.
105	0	0	75. View of Dedham, Suffolk; Gipsies in the fore-ground.
131	5	0	76. The Lock; Companion to the Picture of the Corn Field, now in the National Gallery.
157	10	0	77. View of the River Stour, with white Horse in a Barge.
105	0	0	78. Hadleigh Castle.
110	5	0	79. Salisbury Cathedral, from the Meadows.
45	3	0	80. Dedham Mill and Church.
78	15	0	81. Arundel Mill and Castle; the last picture Mr. Constable painted.

£	s.	d.	Lot.
21	0	0	82. Sketch. Waterloo Bridge.
8	18	6	83. Sketch. Valley farm.
2	5		84. Landscape. Sir W. Beechy.
1	17		85. A pencil drawing.
1	3		86. A sketch. Peter Martyr.

## INDEX

- AGNEW, Mr., 50 *note*  
Allnut, Mr., 38 and *note*  
Andrews, Bishop, 165  
Angelo, Michael, 91, 108 ; *quoted*, 83  
Arabesques, 148  
Arrowsmith, Mr., 74, 80  
Artists' Benevolent Fund, 112  
Arundel, 102  
Ashley ruins, 68  
Ashton, Mrs., collection, 91 *note*  
Assembly Rooms, Hampstead, 99
- BAGNIGGE House, 56 *note*  
Bagnigge Wells, 56 and *note*  
Barbizon, 201, 202  
Barker, 6  
Beaumont, Dowager Countess of, 11, 87  
    Lady, 67, 68  
    Sir George,  
        Collection of, 1-2, 11-12, 18, 67-70 ; Constable and, friend-  
        ship between, 6-7, 11, 34, 67, 107 ; Constable quoted on,  
        68-70 ; "Peele Castle in a Storm, 52 ; the Reynolds  
        Cenotaph, 107
- Beechey, 91  
Bellini, the, 153  
Bembo, Cardinal, 166  
Berghem, 158, 160  
Bergholt, *see* East Bergholt  
Bernardo, 149

- Bicknell, Charles, and Constable, 27, 42, 46 ; death of, 84  
     Maria, *see* Constable, Mrs.  
     Mrs., death of, 43
- Blake, 9, 155
- Bognor, 35
- Bologna, school of, 149
- Bonington, influence in French art, 196 ; and Constable, 197, 198
- Bonner, 101
- Both, 158, 160
- Boucher, Sir Joshua Reynolds and, 161 ; Constable quoted on 161
- Bourdon, Sebastian, 150, 161
- Bradford, Lord, 37
- Brantham Church altar-piece, 20, 22
- Bridgman, Rev. George, 37
- Brighton, Constable on, 73 ; visits to, 81, 182
- Bril, Paul, 149
- British Gallery—  
     Constable on, 63-64  
     Constable's Works in—"A Church Porch," 26 ; "Small Landscape," 38 ; "Cottage in a Cornfield," 49-50 ; "The Cornfield," 82 ; "The Glebe Farm," 82
- British Institution—  
     Constable's Works in—"The White Horse," 76-77 ; "Stratford Mill," 76-77 ; Constable's lectures at the, 106
- British Museum—  
     Constable's Works in—"Paintings of Hampstead Heath," 55 ; "University College, Oxford," 58 ; "Water-colour drawings of Hampstead Heath," 84 ; "Folkestone from the Sea," 99 note ; "Stormy Effect, Littlehampton," 105 ; "Folkestone," 106 note ; "A Ruin," 132-133, 133 note ; "The Lock," 145 ; Engravings of other artists, 143
- Brocheden, Letter to Constable, quoted, 72
- Brookes, Mr., 17
- Bürger, "Histoire de Peintres," 205
- Byron, 154, 196
- CAMPO Santo, the, 159
- Canaletti, Constable compared with, 95

- Caracci, Agostino, 15, 149, 174  
 Carot, Camille, 202-204  
 Carpenter, Mr. James, 39  
 Cenotaph of Sir Joshua Reynolds, 106-109  
 Ceres, 172  
 Chalon, Alfred, 127  
 Chantrey, picture purchased by, 85 ; and "Hadleigh Castle," 88  
 Charles V., 166  
 Charles X., award to Constable, 73  
 Charlotte Street, 85, 184  
 Chiaroscuro of Nature, Constable's use of, 22, 56, 65, 89, 115, 117, 118-119, 145-146, 148, 161, 169 ; West's alteration of "Flatford Mill," of 1800, 18  
 Cicero, 117  
 Cimabue, Constable on, 148, 151, 152  
 Cipriani, 161  
 Classicism, 2, 200 ; reaction against, 196-197  
 Claude, 59, 64, 70, 151, 162, 174, 196 ; Sir George Beaumont's collection, 1, 11-12 ; "Hagar," 11, 15 ; style, 39 ; "Cephalus and Procris," 67 ; "Liber Veritatis," 88 ; Constable quoted on, 94, 150, 160  
 Cole-Orton, violin incident, 6-7, 188 ; Constable on the pictures, &c., 67-70 ; Reynolds' Cenotaph, 107  
 Collins, 56, 74  
 Connoisseurs, 157  
 Constable, Abram, 81  
   Alfred, 101  
   Captain Charles, 103, 184 ; on the "White Horse," 51 ; voyages, 105, 109 ; visit to relatives, 110 ; on the forgeries of Constable, 176  
   George, of Arundel—  
     Friendship with Constable, 98 ; letters from Constable quoted, 99-100, 104, 105-106, 109, 111-112, 135-136, 180 ; visits from Constable, 102-103, 105  
   Golding—  
     Home of, 10-11, 122 ; attitude towards his son's profession, 12-13, 14 ; and Dr. Rhudde, 27 ; letter to Constable quoted, 29-30 ; illness and death of, 43, 45  
   Isabel, gift to the nation, 176-177, 185

Constable—*continued*

## John—

Influence of, on landscape-painting, 4, 195-207; on imagination, *quoted*, 8; birth and early years, 10-12; at Bergholt, 11, 13, 14, 39, 43, 51, 66-67, 106; in London, 12-13, 15, 17, 43, 63; Cecil St., Strand, 15; resumption of his art, 16; tour in Derbyshire, 16-17; at Rathbone Place, 17; contemporary criticism, 17, 175, 184; influence of Girtin on, 20; visit to Lake district, 20; friendship of fellow artists, 24-25; parents desire to foster portrait painting, 26, 36;—commissions for, 33-34, 36, 37; ill-health of, 27, 31, 91-94, 100-101; letter from his father, 29-30; sale of landscapes, 37, 38; "The Lock," sold to Mr. Carpenter, 38-39; death of his mother, 43; illness of his father, 43; death of his father, 45; marriage with Miss Bicknell, 48; children of, 49, 65, 67, 75, 82, 97, 99, 105; life in Keppell Street, 49, 63; at Salisbury, 53-54, 61; incident of the "Water Meadows," 53-54; at Hampstead, 54, 63, 83, 93; in Berkshire, 57; financial affairs, 62-63; "The Haywain" in Paris, 62, 70-71, 199, 200; visit to Cole-Orton Hall, *quoted* on, 69-70; French popularity, 71-73, 73-75, 200-201; at Brighton, 73; gold medal awarded by Chas. X., 73; journal extracts, 73-74; Reynolds' engravings, 74-75; second French gold medal, 77; at Charlotte Street, 82, 85; legacy from Mr. Bicknell, 84; death of his wife, 85; on Claude, *quoted*, 94; burning of the Houses of Parliament, 103; death, 112-113; on the "retouched Stoke," *quoted*, 125; on the "Summer Morning," *quoted*, 134; on the "Rainbow," *quoted*, 139-142; on Raphael, 149; attitude towards literalism and romanticism, 153; on "inspiration," 154; on mannerists and connoisseurs, *quoted*, 157-158, 168; at Worcester, 158-160; advice to young painters, *quoted*, 163-164; on Coxe's "Correggio," 173-174; popularity to-day, 185, 188; influence on French landscape-painting, 197, 200-201; and the impressionist school in France, 199; the "White Horse" in Paris, 200

*Character*, 150, 167, 182, 183; literary taste, 34, 35, 68,



Constable—*continued*

165; sensitiveness, 41-42, 170; as a critic, 167; pungency of criticism, 168-170, 182

*Lectures*, Hampstead, first lecture, 99, 148-158; "History of Landscape-Painting," 99; Hampstead, second lecture, 105; at Worcester, 105-106, 158-160; at the British Institution, 106; method of giving, 147-148; at the Royal Institution, 160

*Letters to—*

Archdeacon Fisher, 56-57, 59-61, 61-62, 63-65, 70, 71-72, 74, 75, 77, 79, 81-84, 145, 150-151, 169, 174, 180; George Constable, 99-100, 104, 105-106, 109, 111-112, 135-136, 180; John Dunthorne, 15-17, 18, 139; John Thomas Smith, 14, 15; Leslie, 87-94, 98-99, 100-103, 110-111, 167-168, 169, 174; Lucas, 91, 121, 123-124, 127, 128, 129-134, 137, 139-140, 141; Mr. Purton, 160; Mrs. Constable, 67

*Relations, &c., with—*

Archdeacon Fisher, 32-33, 46-47, 57, 169-171, 182; letters from Fisher, 58-59, 61, 71, 72, 171; Constable's visit to, 67; Fisher on Constable's landscapes, 36; Blake, 9; Bonington, 198; Boucher, *quoted on*, 161; Brochedon, 72; David Lucas, *see also*, Lucas Mezzotints and Letters to Lucas, 88-89, 114 *et seq.*, 120-121; Dowager Lady Beaumont, 87; Dr. Rhudde, 27, 31, 34-35, 42, 44; Farringdon, 13; Gainsborough, *quoted on*, 3-4,—compared with, 189; George Constable, friendship with, 98; visits to, 102, 105; John Dunthorne the Elder, 8, 11; John Dunthorne, jun., 73, 81, 98; John Jackson, 24; John Thomas Smith, 13; Lawrence, 87; Leslie, 90, 104, 112, 171; Lord Egremont, 103; Miss Bicknell, correspondence of, 27-29, 30-38, 41-48; Mr. Bicknell, 46, 84; Mrs. Fisher, 33; Northcote, 8; Ruskin, criticism of, 189-190, 191, compared with, 181; Sir George Beaumont, 6-7, 11, 34, 67, *quoted on*, 68-70; Stothard, 24, 33, 34; Turner, 86-87, 112, *quoted on*, 94, 105, 109, 190-191, compared with, 52, 177, 181, 189-190; Varley, 168-169; West, 17-18, 31; Wilkie, 24, 103, *quoted on* 109

*Royal Academy*, Constable admitted a student, 15; Associate, 1819, 51; elected Academician, 86-87; on

Constable—*continued*

Hanging Committee of, 1830, 89–90 ; visitor to the Life School, 90, 93, 111, 112

*Style, &c.—*

Characteristics of, 22, 176, 177 ; aims of, 6–8, 18–19, 187, 191, 193, 201 ; “There is room enough for a natural painter,” 8, 18 ; skies, local character, 20 ;—*quoted on* “skies,” 59, 180–181 ; craving for human association, 21, 40–41, 55 ; chiaroscuro, Constable’s use of, 22, 56, 65, 89, 115, 117, 145–146, 148, 161 ;—*quoted on*, 118–119, 169 ; sea-paintings, style, 52–53 ; “Constable’s snow,” 66 ; cpd. with Canaletti, 95 ; “The vacant fields of idealism,” 154, 158, 191 ; forgeries, 175 ; skill as a draughtsman, 177, 178, 189 ; and colour, 188 ; sunlight and storm effects, 192.

*Works, see also—*

British Gallery, British Institution, British Museum, Louvre, Lucas Mezzotints, National Gallery, Royal Academy Exhibitions, South Kensington Collection, Tate Gallery

“A Chymist,” 13–14 ; “An Alchymist,” 13–14 ; the “Torso” for Royal Academy, 15 ; “Flatford Mill,” 17–18 ; “The Windmill,” 19 ; “Christ Blessing Little Children,” 20 ; Lake Sketches, 20–21 ; Family Portrait copying, 21 ; “Christ Blessing the Bread and Wine,” 22 ; “At East Bergholt, Dawn,” 23 ; “Boat-building,” 39 ; “Old Houses at Harnham Bridge,” 61 ; “Salisbury from the Meadows,” 66, 103, 190, “Bentley,” 67 ; “The Waggon,” 74 ; “The Opening of Waterloo Bridge,” 77, 79, 80, 81, 94–97 ; “The Leaping Horse,” 80 ; “The Cenotaph,” 106–109 ; “Whitehall Stairs,” 121 ; “A Cottage in a Cornfield,” 123 ; “English Landscape Series,” *see that title*

## John, jun.—

Birth, 49 ; ill-health, 65, 75, 77, 100–101 ; school at Brighton, 81 ; visit to Geo. Constable, 102, 105 ; preparation for Cambridge, 110, 111 ; death of his father, 112–113

Lionel Bicknell, 84, 101

Constable—*continued*

Maria, 49, 97, 105

Mary, 30

Mrs. (Maria Bicknell)—

Early correspondence with Constable, quoted, 27-29, 30-38, 41-48 ; marriage with Constable, 48 ; Dr. Rhudde's legacy to, 52 ; at Hampstead, 54-55, 82 ; letters from her husband, *quoted*, 67-70 ; at Brighton, 73, 77 ; return to London, 81 ; illness and death, 84-85

Mrs. Golding—

Sir Geo. Beaumont, and, 11 ; letter to John Thos. Smith, 14 ; letter to Constable, 26, 36 ; death, 43

Cook and Sons, Messrs., 185

Cook, Mr., 141

Coombe Wood, 25

Cooper, quoted, 95-96

Copley, 196

Corot, 207

Correggio, Coxe's "Life" of, 173-174

Cotman, 6, 197, 198, 205 and *note*

Cowper, quoted, 9 ; Constable's appreciation of, 34, 35

Cox, 197, 198, 205 and *note*

Coxe, "Correggio," 173-174

Cozens—

Style, 5 ; Ruskin on, 12 ; in Sir G. Beaumont's collection, 67 ; Constable on, 150, 157

Croissy, 201

Crome, 6, 197, 198

Crucifixion, the, 151-152

Cuyp, 99, 100

DARBY, Mr. Francis, 76

David, "Coronation of Empress Josephine," 64 ; school of, 195

Dedham, 11, 17 ; mills, 10 ; church, 40

Dedham Vale, 133

Delacroix, 196 ; "Massacre de Scio," 199-200

Derbyshire, 16

Diaz, 202

Diocletian, Baths of, 148

Dolci, Carlo, 174

Domenichino—

Constable on, 149, 169 ; "St. Jerome," 155, 156

Downshire Hill, 81

Dunthorne, John, jun.—

Constable and, 73, 81 ; death and burial of, 97-98, 133

Dunthorne John, sen.—

Constable and, 8, 11 ; correspondence between, 15-18, 139 ;  
present from Constable, 139

Dürer, Albert, 159

Dutch School, Constable on, 149, 150, 152, 153, 161, 162

Dysart, Countess of, 21, 110

Earl of, 21, 34

EAST Bergholt, 10, 13, 34, 121, 122, 124, 182

Eclectic art, 116

Egremont, Lord, 102, 103

English Landscape Series, *see under* Lucas Mezzotints

Evans, Dr., 92 and *note*

Eyck, Van, 159

FARINGDON, Joseph, R.A., 63

Farringdon and Constable, 13 ; and Wilson, 13

Fernandez, Garcia, 103

Ferrars, Lord, 68

Fielding, Copley, 196, 199

Fiore, Jacopo del, 111 ; Constable on, 151

Fisher, Archdeacon—

Letters to Constable, 32-33, 38, 46-47, 51-52, 58-59, 61, 71,  
72, 77-78, 145, 171-172 ; appreciation of Constable, 36 ; on  
Constable's marriage, 47-48 ; pictures bought by, 50-51,  
53 ; letters from Constable, 56-57, 59-61, 61-62, 63-65, 70-  
72, 74, 75, 79, 83, 84, 150-151, 169, 174, 180 ; relations with  
Constable, 57, 169-171, 182 ; visit of Constable, 67 ; and  
the British Institution, 76-77 ; death at Boulogne, 97 ;  
scholarship of, 172-173 ; and Cox's "Correggio," 173-174

Mrs.—

Constable, and, 33-34, 47 ; on the "White Horse, 51 ;  
illness of, 75

Fitzgerald, letter to Tennyson, 175  
 Flatford Meadows, 39  
 Flatford Mills, 10, 71  
 Flemish art, 149, 150, 161, 162  
 Folkestone, 99, 182  
 Fontainebleau, 201, 202  
 Fonthill, 67  
 Forbin, Count, 73, 74  
 Foreshortening, Constable's skill, 178  
 Foster's Rooms, 176, 184, 185  
 France, landscape-painting in, 195, 196  
 Frith, Mr., 53

## GAINSBOROUGH—

Style, 1-5 ; Earl Dysart's collection, 34 ; Constable on, 150, 157 ; Constable compared with, 189  
 Gautier, 200  
 German School, Constable on, 149, 152, 153, 173  
 Ghirlandaio, 149  
 Gillingham, 67, 182  
 Giorgione, 12, 153  
 Giotto, 148, 149 ; Constable on, 151, 152  
 Girtin, 6, 24, 197 ; Beaumont collection, 11 ; Ruskin on, 12 ; style, 12 ; Turner on, 12 ; influence on Constable, 20 ; Constable on, 150, 157  
 Glover, 67, 168  
 Godfrey, 36  
 Gold, uses of, in painting, 173-174  
 Golden Age, art in, 148  
 Goltzius, 161  
 " Gothic " School, 195  
 Grace Dieu, 68  
 Gray, *quoted*, 102  
 Grimwood, Dr., 10  
 Grosvenor Square, 38  
 Guido, "Aurora," 155, 156-157

HACKERT, 158, 161  
 Hampstead, 9, 54, 182

- Hampstead Village, 164  
 Hanging Committee, 89, 90, 95  
 Harding, J. D., 199 ; "The Tourist," 206  
 Harwich Harbour, 40  
 Hayley, Mr., 35  
 Heathcote, Lady, 31, 32, 37  
 Helmingham Park, 16  
*Herald*, The, 68  
 Herculaneum, 148  
 Historical Painting, symbolical design superseded by, 148, 151  
 Hogarth, 5 ; letter from Lucas, 122-123  
 Holland, pictures from, 64  
 Holmes, Mr. C. J.—  
     Constable's oil studies, *quoted* on, 22 ; "Constable and His  
     Influence," 24 and *note*, 51 and *note*, 176 *note* ; on detec-  
     tion of forgeries, 176  
 Hoppner, 22, 32  
 Horace, 115  
 Huet, 196-197, 199  
 Hugo, Victor, 199, 200  
 Huth Sale, the, 53 *note*
- IMPRESSIONISM, 200 ; Constable on, 161 ; school in France, 199  
 Italian Landscape, 203  
 Italian School, 4, 150, 162, 173
- JACKSON, John, 24, 173  
 Jones, 96
- KAUFFMAN, Angelica, 161
- LAKE district, Constable's visit to, 20  
 "Landscape Annuals," 206  
 Landscape-painting—  
     English school, 2 ; Italian school, 2 ; unpopularity of, 5-6,  
     56 ; Constable's lecture on history of, 148-158, 162 ; first  
     uses of, 151-152 ; indispensable to historical painting,  
     151 ; literalism and romanticism in, Constable on, 153 ;  
     Constable's influence on, 195-207 ; in England, 197  
 Lane, Mr. John, 112



Langham Hill, 40, 82, 121, 141

Lavenham, 10

Lawrence, Sir Thomas, 22, 31, 74 ; attitude towards Constable, 87 ; death of, 89 and *note*

Lee, 167

Leslie—

References to the biography, 13, 24, 25, 27 *et seq.*, 38 *note*, 51 *note*, 86, 88, 103, 111 *note*, 133, 135 *note*, 148 ; on Constable's early works, 14 ; on the "Lake" sketches, 21 ; letters from Constable, 87-89, 92-93, 98-103, 110-111, 167-169, 174 ; and Constable, 90, 104, 171 ; on "Waterloo Bridge," 94-96 ; "Reminiscences," 96 *note* ; guest of Lord Egremont, 103 ; on Charles Constable, 105 *note* ; home of, 110 *note* ; last walk with Constable, 112 ; on the Lucas correspondence, 120, 121 ; on the "Summer Evening," 124-125 ; on the "retouched Stoke," 125 ; on the "Rainbow," 139 ; on Constable's lectures, 162 ; on forgeries of Constable, 175-176 ; on Constable's "skies," 180

Mrs., 110 ; and the "Weymouth Bay," 52, 136

R. C., 184

Lisle, Mayor of, and the "White Horse," 77

Literalism, 153

Literary and Scientific Institute, Hampstead, 162

Lorraine, Claude, *see* Claude

Loutherbourg, De, 2, 158

Louvre, Constable's Works in the—

"Weymouth Bay," 52 and *note* ; the "Haywain," 72

Lucas, David—

"Water Meadows," tale regarding, 53-54 ; relations with Constable, 88-89, 91, 114 *et seq.* ; Constable's correspondence, Wedmore on, 120-121 ; letters from Constable, 121-122, 123-124, 127, 128, 129-134, 137, 139-140, 141 ; genius and style, 122, 143-146 ; letter to Mr. Hogarth, 122-123 ; illness of his wife and child, 128 ; printing press of, 135

Mezzotints—

*English Landscape Series*—List of plates, 114 *note* ; Introduction to, 115-116 ; descriptive prospectus, 117-119 ;

Lucas, David—*continued*

"Golding Constable's house, East Bergholt," 114;  
 "Spring," 114 *note*, 121; "Autumnal Sunset," 114 *note*,  
 121, 124, 144; "Noon," 114 *note*; "River Stour,  
 Suffolk," 114 *note*, 139; "Summer Morning," 114 *note*,  
 133; "Summer Evening," 114 *note*, 123, 124, 127, 144;  
 "A Heath," 114 *note*; "A Dell, Helmingham Park,  
 Suffolk" ("The Wood"), 114 *note*, 123, 126-127; "Yar-  
 mouth, Norfolk," 114 *note*, 137, 138; "A Sea Beach,"  
 114 *note*; "Mill Stream," 114 *note*; "A Lock on the  
 Stour, Suffolk," 114 *note*, 132; "Old Sarum," 114 *note*,  
 131-132, 137; "The Summer-land," 114 *note*, 123, 126;  
 "Stoke-by-Neyland," 114 *note*, 123, 125; "A Mill," 114  
*note*; "Weymouth Bay, Dorset," 114 *note*, 136, 138;  
 "Summer Afternoon after a Shower," 114 *note*; "The  
 Glebe Farm," 114 *note*, 120, 132; "Hadleigh Castle,"  
 88, 114 *note*, 121, 123, 125-126; "Hampstead Heath,"  
 vignette, 115, 144

*Other engravings*, "The Rainbow," 112, 139-142, 146;  
 "The Castle," 126, 127; "Jacques and the Wounded  
 Stag," 127-128, 187; "Waterloo Bridge," 131, 137, 138;  
 "The Cornfield," 132 and *note*, 137, 139, 140; "Castle  
 Acre Priory," 133; "Old Willy Lott's House," 137, 138;  
 "The Lock," 137, 139, 190; "Harwich," 138; "On  
 the Orwell," 138; "Stratford Mill," 139; "A Mill near  
 Brighton," 146

Mrs., illness of, 128, 130, 140

Lucatelli, 161

Luther, Martin, 165

MAETERLINCK, 200

Manet, 207

"Mannerists," Constable on, 157-158

Manners, Lady Louisa, 32, 34

Manuscripts, illuminated, 148

Maratti, Carlo, 65

Marley, 201

Mason, 207

Maturin, 154

- Mengs, 161  
 Meredith, 165  
 Merimée, 200  
 Michel, 196-197, 199  
 Middle Ages, art in, 148, 153  
 Millbank, 23  
 Milton, 165, 171  
 Missals, illuminated, 148, 151  
 Monet, 207  
 Moon, "The Lock" and "The Cornfield" published by, 132, 137  
 Moore, Jacob, 158, 161  
 Morland, 6  
 Morley, Lady, 98  
 Morning and Evening effects, Constable on, 134  
 Morrison, Mr., 72  
 Morton, 175  
 Müller, 197
- NAPOLEON, 206  
 National Gallery—  
     Architecture of, Constable and the, 111 *note*  
     Constable's Works in—"Dedham Vale," 24, 190; "Golding  
         Constable's House," 24; "View on the Stour, near Ded-  
         ham," 24; "The Haywain," 56; "The Glebe Farm," 82-  
         83; "A Summer Afternoon after a Shower," 86; "The  
         Gleaners," 86: "Salisbury from the Meadows," Study,  
         91; "The Valley of the Farm," 104; "The Cenotaph,"  
         108; "Stoke-by-Neyland," sketch, 125; "The Cornfield,"  
         79, 92, 132 *note*; "The Haywain," 177; "The Glebe  
         Farm," 185-187  
 Nativity, Dutch and German representation, 153  
 Naturalism, 4  
 Nayland Church Altar-piece, 22  
 Northcote and Constable, 8
- OLD MASTERS, 23  
 Old Sarum, 131-132  
 Osmington, 77, 182  
 Otley, Mr., 169

Ovid, 196

Owen, 31

PALEY, 165, 182

Pantheon, 83

Parliament, Houses of, burning of, 103

Pembroke, Lord, 81 and *note*

Petworth, 94, 102-103

Phillips, Mr. G. A., collection, 23

Master at Brighton, 81

Pisa, 151

Plutarch, 196

Poussin, Gaspar, 63, 64

Niccolo, 67, 149, 162

Prout, 199 ; "The Tourist," 206

Purton, Mr., letter from Constable, 160

Putney, 24

QUEEN Caroline Trial, 54

RAPHAEL, 90, 108 ; landscapes of, 149 ; Constable on, 154

Realism, 4, 204

Rebow, General, 36

Redhill, 86

Reform Bill, 93

Rembrandt, 137 ; Constable on, 150 ; "The Mill," 161-162

Reynolds, Sir Joshua—

Gainsborough, on, 3, 4 ; *quoted*, 18, 59 ; portraits by, 21 ; influence on Constable's painting, 23 ; Marchioness of Thomond's collection, 34 ; Cenotaph at Cole-Orton, 68, 106-109 ; Constable on, 159 ; and Boucher, 161

S. W., "The Lock," &c., engraved by, 74-75, 145 ; Lucas the pupil of, 114

Rhudde, Dr., and Constable, 27, 31, 34-35, 42, 44 ; legacy to Mrs. Constable, 52

Richardson, 151

Richmond Park, 25

Roberts, Mrs., 17

Robson, 196

- Rodin, 76  
 Rogers, "Italy," 206  
 Romanticism, 196, 200, 202, 204; Constable on, 153  
 Romney, 5  
 Rosa, Salvator, 150, 161  
 Roscoe, "The Tourist," 206  
 Rousseau, Theodore, 201-202  
 Royal Academy Exhibitions—  
   1802, Landscape, 17  
   1803, Landscapes; Studies from Nature, 19  
   1805, Landscape, "Moonlight," 20  
   1807, "View in Westmoreland"; "Keswick Lake"; "Bow Fell," 21  
   1808, "Borrowdale"; "Scene in Cumberland"; "Windermere Lake," 21  
   1809, Landscapes, 24  
   1810, Landscape, "Cumberland," 24  
   1811, "Twilight"; "Dedham Vale," 26  
   1812, "Flatford Mill"; "View of Salisbury," 31  
   1813, Landscape, "Boys Fishing"; Landscape, "Morning," 38  
   1814, "Ploughing Scene in Suffolk"; "A Ferry," 39  
   1815, "Boat-building," 39, 41, 192 *note*; "View of Dedham"; "Village in Suffolk"; Sketch, Landscape, 41  
   1816, "A Wheatfield"; "A Wood, Autumn," 45  
   1817, "Wivenhoe Park"; "A Cottage"; Portrait of Mr. Fisher; "Scene on a Navigable River," 49  
   1818, Landscape, "Breaking up of a Shower," 50  
   1819, "The White Horse" (Scene on the River Stour), 50-51  
   1820, "View of Harwich Lighthouse," 52, 53; "Stratford Mill on the Stour," 52, 53, 56 *note*  
   1821, "Hampstead Heath," "A Shower, Harrow," 55; Landscape, "Noon" (The Haywain), 56-59  
   1822, "View on the River Stour near Dedham"; "Hampstead Heath"; "Malvern Hall, Warwickshire"; "View of the Terrace, Hampstead"; "Study of Trees from Nature," 61  
   1823, "Salisbury Cathedral from the Bishop's Garden," 67,

Royal Academy Exhibitions—*continued*

- 99–100, 192; "A Study of Trees"; A Sketch; "A Cottage," 67
- 1824, "Boat Passing a Lock," 71
- 1825, "Dedham Lock," or "The Leaping Horse," 75–76
- 1826, "The Cornfield," 79–81
- 1827, "Marine and Chain Pier at Brighton"; "Watermill at Gillingham, Dorset"; "Hampstead Heath," 82
- 1828, "Hampstead Heath," 85; "Dedham Vale," 85–86
- 1829, "Hadleigh Castle," 87–88, 126; "A Cottage," 87–88
- 1830, "Dell in Helmingham Park" (The Wood), 90, 126–127, 190; "View of Hampstead Heath," 90
- 1831, "Salisbury from the Meadows," 66, 91–92; "Yarmouth Pier," 92
- 1832, "Waterloo Bridge"; "A Romantic House, Hampstead, Moonlight"; Sir R. Steele's House, Hampstead, 97
- 1833, "Englefield House, Berkshire, Morning"; "A Heath, Showery, Noon"; "Cottage in a Cornfield, Sunset," 98
- 1834, "Mound of the City of Old Sarum"; "Interior of a Church," 101; "Study of Trees, Hampstead," 101–102; "Stoke Pogis Church," 101–102, 109
- 1835, "Valley of the Farm, 103–104
- 1837, "Arundel Mill and Castle," 105, 106, 111, 112, 190
- Diploma Gallery*—"Dedham Lock," or "The Leaping Horse," 75–76; Sketches for Waterloo Bridge, 97
- Royal Institution, Constable's lectures at, 99, 160
- Rubens, 65, 70, 175; Gainsborough and, 2; Constable on, 150; "The Rainbow," 161
- Ruskin—
- Wilson, on, 2; on Cozens, 12; on Girtin, 12; on Turner, 12; Constable compared with, 181; on Constable, 181, 189–190, 191; "Modern Painters," 190
- Ruysdael, Jacob, 15, 162
- ST. CLOUD, 201
- Salisbury, 50, 53, 182
- Salisbury, Bishop of, 32, 33, 36, 65
- Salvator, 59
- Scott, read in France, 196



Shakespeare, 68

Smith, John Thomas, advice to Constable, 13, 40-41 ; and Constable, 14, 15

Somerset House, 96 *note*

South Kensington Collection—

Description, 176-177 ; pen and ink drawings of 1796, 13 ; twelve studies made in Derbyshire, 16 ; sketches of Lake district, 20-21 ; "Bergholt Church Porch," 23 ; "Study of Flowers," 39 ; "Cart and Horses," 178 ; "Boat-building," 40 ; "Dedham Vale," 40, 133-134 ; "View of Harwich, Lighthouse," 52, 53 ; "Water Meadows near Salisbury," 53 ; "The Haywain," 56, 178 ; "A Cottage near Reading," 58 ; "High Street, Oxford," 57 ; "Reading from the River," 58, 178 ; "The Old Bridge, Abingdon" ; "The Canal Banks, Newbury," 58 ; "Salisbury from the Bishop's Garden," 65-66 ; Sketch of "Dedham Lock," 75-76 ; "Water Mill," 82 ; "A Mill near Brighton," 86, 146 ; "Hampstead Heath," 90, 178 ; "Stoke Pogis Church," 101 ; Sketches of Petworth, 103 ; "Worcester as seen from the North" ; "A Worcestershire Plough," 106 ; "Autumnal Sunset," 121 *note* ; "Spring," 122 and *note* ; "Stoke-by-Neyland," 125 *note* ; "View on the Orwell," 131 *note* ; "A Ruin," 133 *note* ; "Weymouth Bay," 136 *note* ; "Old Willy Lott's House," 138 *note* ; Drawing of an Ash, 164 ; "The Cornfield," 177, 178 ; "View near Salisbury," 177-178 ; "Windsor Castle from the River," 177 ; "Abingdon Bridge," 178-179 ; "Yarmouth Jetty," 138, 178 ; Oil Sketches, 179-180 ; "Stacking Hay," 179 ; "Study of an Elm Tree," 179 ; "Study of Ash Trees," 179 ; "Study of Tree Stems," 179 ; "Study of Trees, Hampstead," 179 ; "Old Sarum," 180 ; "Stoke Pogis Churchyard," 180 ; "Stonehenge," 180 ; Water-colour Sketches, 180 ; "Study of Clouds," 181

Southey, 69

Spranger, 161

Stafford, Marquis of, 34

Stoke Church, 121

Stoke-by-Neyland Church, 125

Stothard, Mr., and Constable, 24, 33, 34 ; criticism of "Waterloo Bridge," 95

Stour, the, 39, 40, 61  
Swaneveldt, 67

TASSI, 149  
Tate Gallery—

“A View of Harwich Lighthouse,” 52 ; “The Salt Box,” 54–55

Tennant, Sir Charles, collection, 138 *note* ; buyer of “Waterloo Bridge,” 96

Tennyson, letter from Fitzgerald, 175

Thackeray, W., 56 *note*

Thomond, Marchioness of, 33–34

Thomson, 165

Tinney, Mr., 53, 56, 58 ; Constable commissioned by, 63 ; and British Institution, 77

Titian, 12, 59, 63, 153, 159 ; “Peter Martyr,” 111, 155–156, 160

Turner—

Wilson, and, 2 ; “Calais Pier,” 6 ; “The Garden of the Hesperides,” 6 ; on Girtin, *quoted*, 12 ; Ruskin on, 12 ; Constable *quoted* on, 31, 94, 105, 109, 190–191 ; “Frost,” 38 ; Constable compared with, 52, 177, 181, 189–190 ; relations with Constable, 86–87, 95–97, 112 ; “Liber Studiorum,” 88 ; “Entrance to the Scheldt,” 97 ; Coast Series, 206

UCCELLO, Paolo, 149, 151

VAGRANCY Acts, 164

Valenciennes, 195

Varley, 199 ; and Constable, 168–169

Velde, Van der, 63

Venetian School, 149, 153

Veneziano, Andrea, 159

Vernet, 158, 161

Vernon, Mr., 104

Veronese, Paul, 65, 175

Virgil, 196

WALKER, 207

Ward, James, 6

- Watteau, "The Ball," 174  
 Watts, Constable cpd. with, 76  
 Watts, David Pike, 20, 28, 36  
 Wedmore, Frederick—  
     "Constable: Lucas," 120 and *note*, 121, 122, 135 *note*; on the  
     "retouched Stoke," 125; on the Lucas engravings, 128  
 Well Walk, Hampstead, 83, 85  
 West, Benjamin—  
     Constable, friendship with, 17-18, 38; on "Flatford Mill,"  
     31; quoted, 179  
 White, "Natural History of Selborne," 182  
 Wilkie, 32, 74; and Constable, 24; "Columbus," 103; Constable  
     on, 109  
 Williams, Leader, Constable's letter to, 158-159  
 Wilson, Richard—  
     Influence on landscape-painting, 1, 2, 5; and Turner, 2;  
     and Farringdon, 13; copied by Constable, 15; Sir G.  
     Beaumont's collection, 67; Constable quoted on, 150, 157  
 Wimbledon Common, 25  
 Windsor, Lord, "John Constable," 105 *note*; "Constable: The  
     Makers of British Art," 115 *note*, 158 and *note*; on Con-  
     stable's Windmills, 122  
 Wint, De, 197, 198, 205 and *note*  
 Wooton, 161  
 Worcester, Constable's lectures in, 105-106, 158-160; Exhibition  
     at, 105 and *note*  
 "Worcester Guardian," report of Constable's lectures, 158-159  
 Wordsworth, *quoted*, 52, 136; lines on the Reynolds' cenotaph,  
     107-108  
 Wouvermans, 158  
  
 YOUNG, 64  
  
 ZUCCHERELLI, 158, 161

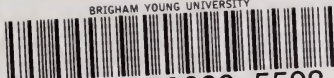








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